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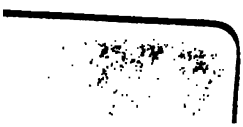
ANNIE STEGER WINSTON



MEMOIRS OF A CHILD

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BY

ANNIE STEGER WINSTON

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MEMOIRS OF A CHILD

1. The Child and the Child's Earth

ONCE upon a time there was a child whom the moon followed when she walked; which seemed to the child interesting, but not especially wonderful, though she wondered at many other things. There was no reason to her mind why the moon should not follow her; why thunders and lightnings should not mark the displeasure of Heaven at her childish peccadilloes, or the rainbow shine out as a special and peculiar token for good. There was in her world no tiresome, inexorable Uniformity of Nature. Anything might happen; and whatever happened, happened

to her. And yet the child was no egotist. She was to herself so little an entity, so much a mere bundle of sensations, of reflections from without, that, in looking back to see the world through the eyes of that child, she herself is of all phenomena the vaguest. She becomes merely the Child — the incarnate spirit of childhood — even while I call her I.

But what she saw remains in pictures vivid enough; for instance, the very shade of the cloudless blue sky under which she found herself once alone in an open field; alone, as it seemed to her, in the earth. No doubt, she was near the house, and under surveillance; but there seemed to her to stretch around an immeasurable solitude. Suddenly, apparently for the first time in her life, she became conscious of the sky, of the overpowering immensity above her and its awful unbroken intensity of blue. A crushing horror and dread

seemed to pin her to the spot. She stood, a shuddering mite, alone under that stupendous gulf, feeling that it might descend and swallow her up.

Such a sky remained to the child always more or less disquieting; even accusing, seemingly, in some occult way, to the conscience. Once she and another child were gleaning the last few sweet burnished-crimson strawberries of a stripped patch, with perfect assurance of the tacit consent of the owner, the other child's father, when all at once she was aware of that intolerable vastness of darkling blue above her, and quailed with a sudden conviction of wrong-doing; a conviction deepened by an otherwise inexplicable low rumble of thunder.

Vastness to the child was always more or less discomposing. But at home in the city the sky never struck her as uncomfortably vast, though her view of it was comparatively unrestricted. On the contrary,

she would often, in fancy, make it a playground; would transport herself thither in make-believe so triumphant that the luxury of clambering about the delectable cloud-mountains remains almost as real as a memory. These clouds, she early decided, were smoke. Could she not with her own eyes see the soft grey and white wreaths ascending?

The stars, of course, were friendly little spangles shining out from the roof of the world after the sun went down; not in the least awe-inspiring; infusing a chastened delight even into darkness. One might "speak for" any of them which one fancied — the Evening Star was the great prize — and claim it for the night with a very definite sense of possession.

The moon, as I said, followed the child; but she soon found out that there were others whom it also followed. And this too must be claimed to be really hers. One

must be the first to say My moon! My moon! when it appeared in the evening; a necessity which brought about one of the small tragedies of the child's life.

One naturally said My moon! in a shriek, and more than once, to make sure of it. And once in the country — not at the place which was to the child *par excellence* "the country," but another — the child and a playmate were on the front porch waiting for the moon to rise. The child was the first to see it, and screamed "My moon!" to claim it; and then "My moon! My moon!" in pure exultation that it was hers. Just then the door opened, and the master of the house came out, and hushed the child unsmilingly; reminding her that a member of the family was ill. This was a crushing humiliation never to be forgotten.

The sun to her was not at all the source of day, but a mere accessory; its specific

function being to dispel clouds, and so prevent rain. Only when its good offices were needed to bring about the "clearing off" essential to the execution of cherished plans was it much regarded. It was too dazzling to look at and ponder over, except, perhaps, at sunset, and then the clouds seemed even more beautiful and wonderful. It was only when it loomed red, gigantic, shorn of its beams, close to the ground in a cloudless sky, that the child felt its majesty.

Upon the whole, it is needless to say, the child received the world at its face value, quite in the primordial way. Whatever looked flat or round was flat or round, even after she was more or less aware of the Copernican theory. And her attitude toward nature was also primitive, tinged with instinctive fetichism. There was in all things a sort of life, prone to become lowering.

Trees, especially, were capable of investing themselves with awe; most of all when they stood in sombre phalanxes; an impression deepened, no doubt, by the darkness they engendered. Tall dark pines, in particular, often seemed to her to stand towering aloft in a sort of menacing silence.

Probably their slim tallness contributed no little to their effect upon the child, in whom there was an antipathy to marked height which made it a torture to stand at the base of a telegraph pole and look upward to the top. Nothing in childhood remains more vivid than the shuddering faintness once caused by a fearful flagpole rising dizzily from the flatness of the fair-grounds. To the child, it seemed beyond human endurance, and yet she could not withdraw her eyes from it, so strong was the fascination of horror.

This, however, was a physical horror,

unmixed with the curious boding sadness, the half-superstitious shrinking, so apt to be induced in her by contact with imposing aspects of nature. It was well that the child, while she remained a child, never saw a mountain, for the sight would have carried with it an oppression which would have been absolute pain, an irresistible dread and sinking of spirits; well that for her the heavenly bodies were so comfortably minimised.

In mere width of horizon there was a solemnity which, at times became oppressive; though what that latent disquietude peculiar to the country was, the child did not in the least understand. She analysed it, I think, as Remorse (for general and hopeless depravity), Home-sickness, Apprehension of Snakes.

Whatever stirred undefined dread in the child invariably suggested snakes; not "sure 'nough" snakes, terrible only for

their capacity to bite — though the child did not at all in her own mind formulate the distinction — but mysterious, intrinsically fearful serpents, which were realities to her imagination only, not to her reason; "moist, unpleasant" creatures belonging to the region of "chaos and old night," and haunting dark, impenetrable holes and corners. For the child was almost as much given as an ancient geographer to peopling the unexplored with shapes of fear.

With all its lurking disquietudes, however, the child's world was full of enchantment, of intoxicating beauty.

> "Little birds wake in the morning,
> And sing at the earliest dawning,"

she said to herself one day; said it over and over again, and skipped with ecstasy, it seemed to sum up so the beauty of the world. The words were to her shot through and through with the rosy light of morning, with the loveliness of apple

blossoms, with the rapture of bird music, with the freshness of spring.

Then there was the surpassing beauty of the snow, and the marvel of snow-crystals; there were rainbows and sunsets, and autumn leaves, whose evanescent tints the child would vainly seek to preserve; butterflies and humming-birds and glittering insects; flowers and mosses and trees (which were often of a grace altogether sweet and smiling); translucent pools, witcheries of light and shade, and over all, tempered at times with moods of sternness, the eternal, ever-changing, supernal loveliness.

People

2. People

WITH the same sub-conscious, impersonal egoism which marked her attitude toward the world of nature, the child also vaguely claimed mankind for her own,—instinctively made love for herself the fundamental human virtue, the virtue without which no other virtue was possible. Good people were those who manifested kindness toward her, and they were good strictly in proportion to the degree of kindness manifested; bad people were those who were careless of the child's feelings, welfare, or wishes. The worthy clergyman, for instance, who silenced her exuberant claiming of the moon, earned thereby a personal estimate exceedingly unflattering.

On the whole, one was decidedly easier

in the society of one's contemporaries than in that of miscellaneous adults, who, as it seemed to the child, were not to be depended upon. Few adults, indeed, except those nearest to her by ties of blood, and one or two who especially petted her, played any real part in the child's life, or were much considered by her. Broadly speaking, the child's world was peopled by children. Almost all adults who entered it, entered it only as foreigners and aliens, with whom no satisfactory medium of communication existed, and in whose society, consequently, there were likely to be unexpected and disconcerting developments.

There was, for instance, a lady with whom the child had begun to feel almost on terms of intimacy, from her letting her sit and watch her paint pictures. This was to the child a priceless privilege, the very smell of the oil and turpentine seeming to her delicious. But one day, instead of let-

ting her feet dangle as usual from her chair, she rested them upon the rung. This was luxurious, but not well, perhaps, for the lady's chair; as it struck the lady as she chanced to look up. And so she told her —gently enough, no doubt, for she was fond of the child—not to do that, not to put her feet on the chair that way. And immediately the child's whole pleasure faded, and there remained a sore spot in the child's memory.

Then there was a lady whom the child was telling something, incidentally using the word raggetty, which was perfectly current in her own world; and the lady, instead of listening, told her not to say *raggetty*, but *ragged;* which effectually quenched the impulse to conversation, and made the child feel very small and ignorant indeed.

The child, I think, was quite as exacting in her ideal of politeness toward herself

then, as she was afterwards when no longer a child. And adult manners struck her as, on the whole, imperfect. Grown people would whisper and exclude one from portions of the conversation. They would make personal remarks. They often had highly perverted ideas of humour, leading them to put one in excessively uncomfortable and embarrassing positions for their own amusement, and preposterous misconceptions of the agreeable in that one was expected to enjoy these excruciating pleasantries.

The child, for example, was sent once to buy some trifling thing — a yard of cambric, I think — and given just the small sum necessary to purchase it. She asked for it at the store, and a very tall old gentleman measured it, cut it off, and began to wrap it up. And then the child, as a preliminary to laying down the money she had brought, said conventionally, "How

much is it?" The old gentleman fixed his eyes on her very solemnly, and said, "Two dollars," to the child's utter consternation and confusion. And then he evidently expected her to laugh when he explained that it was a joke!

One of the few figures that stand out distinctly in the very dawn of memory, more distinctly even than the child's nurse, is the plump, good-natured cook who used to comfort the child upon occasion with soft bits of plastic, sweet-smelling dough — an unfailing antidote to grief. The nurse, as subsequent acquaintance assures me, was a worthy, but rather phlegmatic person, without especial tact or resourcefulness; — she did, however, introduce the child to the Tar Baby, as I dimly remember.

Elderly coloured people, on the whole, seemed to the child among the most agreeable of adults, particularly those who, under the old *régime*, had belonged to the

family. Some of these had established themselves upon the outskirts of the city, and would come in from time to time to spend the day, bringing offerings of apples and peanuts in the bottom of capacious, otherwise empty, baskets. There were others of this class whom the child knew in the country; and, taking them altogether, they seemed to her to be delightful persons, thoroughly cheerful, sympathetic, and tactful, and very happy in their conceptions of hospitality, especially when it took the shape of smoking-hot ash-cakes.

The child knew, though not intimately, two or three rather notable people. There was, for instance, a little withered woman who came to the house sometimes to do some sort of work, which once, at any rate, must have involved the use of a hammer; for the solitary remark of hers which survives intact is a rather wistful reference to such a tool, one presumably

provided by the family for her temporary use. "This," she said, "is a mighty good *barmer*. I wish 't was mine!" Her unique distinction was that her husband had been massa-*creed* by the Indians; an event which the child dimly connected with the massacre at Jamestown, and which thus cast about the widow the glamour of historic as well as tragic dignity.

Hers, however, after all, was only reflected glory. In the person of one of her own uncles by marriage, the child saw with horror and fascination, an actual victim of the process of scalping at the hands of the ruthless redskins. This gentleman had a perfectly bald and shining crown, rendered conspicuous by the darkness of the surrounding hair. Anybody could see at a glance that he had been scalped; and then she knew it, besides, because his own son had told her so.

An interest more pleasant attached to a

good-natured Italian confectioner named Columbus, whom the child respected as the discoverer of America.

There was a very black man, however, named Edmund, — a sort of preacher, I think, but in his lay capacity a general-utility man about the house, — who, in a different way, was still more impressive. For he claimed, or so the child understood, that he could pray for anybody to die, and the person would die. This was very awful to think of, and made the child respect him very much; though it may possibly have been only a grim joke, — a specious association of unrelated propositions, like the famous sentence current in the child's world and designed for the confusion of the unwary, "I saw a horse-fly over the river, and a little dog sitting on its tail."

Then there was the hermit, — a mysterious, always silent old man, reputed to be

a German nobleman, — who lived without visible means of support down in one of the "gullies" of the city in a shanty constructed as naïvely and crudely as a sparrow's nest, of any worthless thing which could be pressed into service, the predominating factor being excessively rusty sheet-iron. There was a stove-pipe projecting from the roof, which added a touch of coziness to what already seemed to the child an extremely fascinating residence; one reflecting a unique distinction upon its occupant.

A very little, decrepit old woman who used to go about gathering sticks is another figure which remains vivid; not so much from its inherent interest (though the child was deeply and sincerely sorry for her) as because she appeared in the child's day-dreams as a sort of fairy godmother. For the child had been very polite to her, — not, I am afraid, without

ulterior motives, — and had helped her in her stick gathering; and surely this should have resulted, according to all precedent, in the making of the child's fortune.

But the really important personages, I repeat, outside of her own family, were children. What they said and thought of things in general outweighed beyond all comparison ordinary adult judgment. It was they who really made public opinion; they who laid down authoritative laws of etiquette and convention. Boys, however, did not count. For one was not supposed to take any notice of boys.

Among the little *coterie* of cousins, some visiting and some at home, that would gather in the country, the conventional thing was to hate boys with indiscriminate hatred, — all, that is, except one's nearest kin, — and utterly and ostentatiously to abjure their society. This attitude the child knew to be mainly a polite

fiction, a social convention not unmixed with coquetry, but it reacted upon the imagination, and made one feel something like real panic when flying from possible pursuit.

One day the child and some of the other children were playing peacefully in a broken-down carriage, when there appeared upon the scene a cousin a good deal older than herself, and a friend who was visiting him, from the latter of whom the children had consistently flown. One boy took his station upon one side of the carriage and the other upon the other, looking in alternately at opposite doors, chanting a strophe and antistrophe of polite inquiry, one vanishing as the other appeared, like figures in a Swiss clock.

It was very exasperating and confusing; the more so, that these attentions seemed to be pointedly addressed to the child, and most of all, perhaps, because the child was

conscious of rather admiring the visitor, which was treason to convention. So confusing it became at last that it was not to be borne, and the child flew at the visitor's rhythmically reappearing head with a sudden reckless abandon of resentment which she could never afterwards recall without a blush. This deplorable occurrence really marks an era in the child's life, for after that she knew beyond question that she was a Spitfire; which was her first definite and distinct conception of Herself.

The Garden

3. The Garden and a Few Related Things.

AT home in the city the child played much alone in the large grassy yard at the side of the house. There were crêpe myrtles in it, and roses of various old-fashioned kinds, and Pyrus japonica, whose blossoming thrilled her with assurances of spring — whose little red cups were full to overflowing with the elixir of delight. But the child did not think of these as cups when she viewed them individually; they were ladies in spreading red silk skirts and tight little bodices of green.

Around the yard was a border in which there were flowers, perennials and annuals. A foot or two of this, taking in a thorny climbing-rose, was the child's own par-

ticular garden; one not very sedulously cultivated, partly because of an unconquerable horror of earthworms, partly because of an artless mental dissociation of cause and effect in the realm of horticulture.

Nevertheless, the garden was the theatre of events. For instance, a pineapple-top planted there actually took root and grew, in a sullen and reluctant way. That pineapple "tree" seemed to the child a rare and precious possession — a possession precious enough to afford the solemn joy of renunciation. It was therefore tenderly uprooted and laid upon the sacred altar of friendship. A pea vine once sprang up in her garden and produced peas — a whole pod full at the least — which were different to the child from all other peas that ever grew, so instinct were they with the whole mystery of growth. And then the rosebush which was hers "root and all, and all in all," brought forth beautiful,

waxy-white roses which the child looked upon with a vague feeling akin to the pride of personal achievement.

There was, however, planted ingloriously over toward the kitchen regions, a rose of a different kind (or a so-called rose, for it was not truly a rose at all), which for some mysterious, childish reason she loved even better. Sometimes I pass on the street car an old house in whose yard is just such another bush of vivid yellow dots and my heart warms toward it, remembering the child who so loved its counterpart that she devised and coveted for herself the name Little Red Bird Sitting on a Yellow Rose Bush — which really has an agreeable Indian sound. This "rose" was hers in some especial and peculiar way, as by right of discovery; for no one else seemed to be alive to its charms. There were gorgeous peonies blooming in other parts of the yard which seemed to her the acme of

mingled splendour and sweetness, but she did not love them. She never felt them to be in any way her own. They were everybody's. Their appeal was universal. One could not pre-empt their loveliness, and exult over it with the delight of exclusive possession. One might revel in them; one could not have a subtle personal bond as of special understanding. For mere sensuous delight she would, no doubt, have chosen the peonies; but one loves a flower best, perhaps, as one loves a person best, when one's love is not reducible to any formula; when it is based on something intangible, supersensuous, not to be adequately expressed in words.

Needless to say, the child herself never tried to account for the curious affection with which she regarded those tiny, button-y yellow blossoms — blossoms as little beautiful, I surmise, as any known to botany.

Perhaps the gold colour held suggestions of preciousness. Perhaps the garishness of hue gave needed stimulation to the undeveloped colour-sense. Undoubtedly the minuteness of the blooms was an element of fascination, as minuteness always is to children. The most delightful thing about fairies is their delicious littleness, which again makes the miniature carry suggestions of fairyland and so have a double charm. At any rate, the yellow rose was the child's first flower love. But first love, no matter what poets and romancers may say, is usually neither discriminating nor lasting. First there is Rosaline, and then Juliet.

The child's playground, as I have said, was a grassy yard, not kept scrupulously trimmed, else it would have been shorn for the child of half its delight. Bird-legs, as the child in her own mind called a certain slim, tall grass with a branching crown that

was really footlike in a sketchy way, elevated themselves with the jaunty security of a man with his feet on his own mantelpiece. Vetches were there, with their fascinatingly minute pink-purple blossoms and pods of fairy peas, these last being one of the staples of the little store which the child kept in a corner of the doorway. There were the soft, velvety, pink blooms of the rabbit's-foot clover also, to play the part of commodities, though its precise rôle was never determined to the child's perfect satisfaction. Buttercups and dandelions flourished unchecked; and clover, to be made into chains; and peppergrass, whose little fiery pods the child would eat with the curious, supersensuous relish of children for things that are edible only incidentally as it were, and for things that are aesthetically appealing; like "sour-grass," grass-nuts, the "glue" of fruit trees, the drop of honey in the chalice of the coral

honeysuckle and at the base of the tulip tree's petals; and numberless other things made enticing almost wholly by extrinsic considerations.

But the purest joy which the yard, or even nature at large, perhaps, ever afforded the child, came from the unexpected finding of a tiny blue star which had burst from a blade of grass, not different at all, so far as the child could see, from the surrounding myriads of grass-blades. All grass, from that time forth, was different from what it had been; for it all held for her the potentiality of a sudden exquisite bourgeoning. From any one of a million blades might spring, she felt, that bit of celestial blue, which seemed to her, nevertheless, a sort of miracle, a beautiful afterthought of nature. This became the flower of the child's fancy, the fairy flower, to be ever sought, — though found, alas, only this once, I think, in all childhood.

This fruitless quest doubtless gave the little azure star an added glamour; but it does not explain its unique hold upon the child's imagination. Once, in a tangle of unlovely growth on the side of a ditch, just out of town, she found a wild orange-lily growing tall and brilliant, a gorgeous flower among weeds. But this — although it stamped itself indelibly on the child's memory, although she ever afterwards sought its counterpart, and sought in vain — did not take any especially deep hold on her fancy, or catch hold of the chords of her heart; its very gorgeousness, perhaps, setting it outside of the range of her sympathies.

The child found, one day, a yellow toad-flax, or butter-and-eggs, growing in the yard. This was a treasure-trove to be exulted over, not only on account of its fascinating peculiarity of a "practicable" mouth which could actually be fed things, but because it was a wild flower. It seemed

to her, I think, an interesting coincidence, and only a coincidence, that in the very spot from which she had cropped this blossom she afterwards found another exactly like it. I do not think she thought of wild flowers as having roots and as going through the same deliberate processes of germination, growth, and development as other plants, but rather looked upon them as being impromptu and unprepared for.

The spontaneity of wild flowers made no small part of their charm. They seemed to be pure gratuities of nature, half-playful largess tossed in one's path, or hidden to provoke delightful search. And thus with wild flowers was connected that exhilaration of "finding things" which made an Easter egg-hunt so keen a pleasure, and even the ordinary looking for eggs in the country a thrilling amusement.

Then there was in wild flowers the charm of association. The humblest blos-

som from the fields and woods brought the fields and woods to one's inner consciousness. And the child had times of nature-hunger when the mere thought of tangled depths of greenery, of "lush grasses," of clear little threads of water rippling over mossy stones and hung over by feathery ferns, was at once a tantalisation and a delight.

None of the garden flowers were to the child what the spiky, fragrant, ivory-white balls of the button-bush were, and blue-bottles, and the little wild white violet, so faintly sweet that the child thought that she alone knew that it was sweet, and, above all, the once found, ever searched for, blue-eyed grass. This, to the child, was different from all flowers and the dearest of all, as the concrete assurance of enchanting possibilities latent in the prosaic, the every-day; though she could not have analysed her own rapture.

4. Of Divers Delights

IT is worthy of note, I think, how independent the child — any child — is of the tyranny of the senses, how supersensuous his pleasures are. A halo of suggestion about a flower is more to him than beauty; the savour of his especial cates and dainties is, as a rule, altogether a secondary consideration.

Green fruit, for instance, really is not good; and the child, when he stops to think, knows it. It is not for the actual taste that he eats and enjoys a grass-green apple, or a tiny peach just emerged from its nest of rosy petals, but for its traditional or ideal taste, and for its association with pleasing aspects of nature. They are, as it were, symbols of delight. The pleas-

ure which they impart is almost wholly an æsthetic and imaginative one.

With a child all of the senses are upon approximately the same level; all are to be used to make mental connection with the outside world; as witness the baby's instinctive putting into its mouth of any object that it admires or considers worth investigating. So to the larger child, to eat pretty or interesting things is only another way of establishing contact with them, or with what they stand for to his imagination. Our especial child's pleasure in the beadlike shape and deep, lustrous brown of chinquapins, and her pleasure in eating them were one and indivisible. Once, seeing one of her schoolmates eating a florid candy-apple,— a creation which to adult eyes would have been painfully suggestive of plaster of Paris, and which was rendered yet more inedible in appearance by the addition of two or three bright-

green leaves of a tinny nature, — she looked upon it, I remember, as a most exceptionally charming luncheon.

And the tinny leaves, I am satisfied, added distinctly to this effect, by the very fact of producing an added appearance of inedibility, and so giving rise to the fascinating idea of eating something not originally intended to be eaten. The charm of the unintended plays no small part in childhood. Who that has been a child does not thrill with sympathy in the rapture which David Copperfield felt at first sight of Mr. Peggotty's boat residence?

"If it had been Aladdin's palace, roc's egg and all, I suppose I could not have been more charmed with the romantic idea of living in it. There was a delightful door cut in the side, and it was roofed in, and there were little windows in it; but the wonderful charm of it was that it was a real boat, which had no doubt been

on the water hundreds of times, and which had never been intended to be lived in on dry land. That was the captivation of it to me. If it had ever been meant to be lived in, I might have thought it small or inconvenient or lonely; but never having been designed for any such use it became a perfect abode."

It was in part, at least, the charm of the unintended which made the attraction of certain favourite play-places. There was a garden which the child played in sometimes, — a sort of Eden it seemed to her, — full of great bushes laden so heavily with pink roses that the very ground around them was carpeted thick with fallen pink petals. There was also, in the garden, a beautiful white fringe-tree, which made the child think of grated cocoa-nut, and everything else that was rich and rare. And there were divers other delights. But the most notable feature of all was an an-

cient box-tree, into whose dusky heart the children had burrowed and hollowed out a spicy, airless, prickly retreat — a tight-fitting boudoir — in whose green semi-darkness one might sit precariously and hold social converse, sneezing occasionally from the dust.

Another play-place made charming by perversion from its original intention was a clean, new pig-pen in a grassy spot in the country. This was roofed over in some way by the children — making sitting obligatory — and formed a sort of club-house, which was the scene of social functions of an entrancing nature. The delights of one banquet which was served there — the menu consisting, I think, of hot corn-bread and turnip salad, furnished, no doubt, by the friendly cook — stamped themselves indelibly on the child's mind. For the refreshments acquired from circumstances a flavour which almost entitled them to rank as Viands.

What Viands were, by the way, was to the child interestingly vague — beyond the fact that they were delicious things served at fairy banquets in vase-like golden vessels, and partaken of reclining on a couch in a slim, high-waisted gown with a transparent veil drawn gracefully over one shoulder, or in very long stockings and excessively short trousers, as the case might be.

The child knew a little girl in town who lived a part of the time in a fairy region known as "Up the Country," where, as it appeared, there were real gold butterflies flying around; where there was a perennial supply, presumably from some natural source, of doll-babies completely equipped with dresses, bonnets, parasols, houses, carriages, and tea-sets; and where everybody sat up in trees and ate ice-cream. The little girl mentioned these circumstances casually in extending an in-

vitation to the child to visit her; an invitation which the child ardently desired to accept.

Where the child herself spent the summer there was a certain mimosa — one of the most beloved of all play-places — which would have been an ideal dining-place. It was a large, beautiful, climbable tree, full of comfortable crotches, and covered in its season with the soft rose of innumerable filmy peach-scented blossoms; but meals were served in the house, at the table, in the prosaic way so incomprehensibly dear to adults, and not there.

And other features of the other child's rural life were lacking. But even the comparatively tame country which she herself knew was full of delights. To the country belonged the pleasure, keen, albeit chastened and pensive, of maintaining a charming little cemetery, marked off by three small cedars, and designed for the

decent burial of such downy yellow ducks and chickens as succumbed to the perils of infancy; the pleasure of making "dens" in the orchard, down under the jungle of May-weed, and burying in them green apples which would take on an unnatural acrid softness, and be much esteemed as delicacies; the pleasure of fruit from the tree and berries from the bush, and of little mossy nooks to make "play-houses" in, and of acorn cups and lichens to help on the house-furnishing; the pleasure of straw-stacks, exhilarating to climb, luxurious to nestle in, thrilling to slide down, — and the ecstasy of going barefoot. For ecstasy it was; though the eagerly craved privilege was for a little while secretly regretted — every grass-stalk seeming a needle to the tender soles.

But that passed, and the joys incident to shoelessness remained. There was the joy of dewy grass; the joy of climbing

trees and walking fences; the joy of "making houses" in the damp sand of the driveway, by packing it in a smooth hard mound over one's foot, which was then deftly withdrawn, leaving a neat and commodious little mansion, which one would embellish further with a front yard and a stately cedar or two; and, most exquisite of all, the joy of paddling in a certain little pebbly-bottomed spring; a little spring so clear that it seemed to have no depth at all, but which swirled deliciously about one's ankles, and even gave the added joy of angling. Equipped with a bent pin tied to a spool-cotton line, one might actually have the blissful excitement of catching an occasional, guileless, perfectly apparent crayfish — returning it afterwards, agitated but not injured, to be caught another day.

5. The Child and "the Creatures"

FISHING for crayfish, the child considered an exquisite sport; but it was a sport not to be enjoyed except in the country. At home in the city, however, there was an imperfect substitute in the catching of jack-snappers. This form of fishing presented the pleasing incongruity of being conducted on dry land,—a peculiarity which appealed to the child's imagination.

One would see a little round hole which looked as unimposing as if somebody had merely stuck a slim pencil in the ground; and one would forthwith procure a straw or a stout blade of grass and carefully insert it, leaving one end out. One would then sit down, and await developments.

In a minute or two, if fortune favoured, a marked agitation would manifest itself in the straw or the grass-blade, and one would hastily jerk it up, bringing with it into the light of day a fat, white, leggy creature, from which one precipitately retired.

I do not remember the child's ever engaging in the immemorial amusement of putting a live coal on a terrapin's back; but she knew of this pastime from friends, and, so far as I know, she entertained no prejudice against it. All that was patent apparently to those who had had the pleasure of experimenting with the problem of rapid transit in connection with a terrapin was the grotesqueness of the creature's sudden abandonment of its appearance of infinite leisure for one of extreme and pressing haste. And the child, I feel sure, would have seen the transaction from the same cheerful point of view. If kind fortune had ever thrown a terrapin in her way,

and there had been a fire within reasonable distance, she would without doubt have felt that it was an almost culpable neglect of her advantages if she had not embraced the opportunity of demonstrating for herself the curious fact of natural history, that a terrapin can run "like anything" when it wants to. Why the red-hot coal should make it want to run, she never especially considered. One cannot, of course, attempt to explain all the idiosyncrasies of irrational creatures.

Fishing for crayfish and jack-snappers was sport for sport's sake; but in the catching, or attempted catching of most live things there was, in addition to the hunting-instinct, the object of establishing affectionate personal relations. Even the "Juney-bug" tied by the leg to a long thread, and making a whirring bronze-green circle about one's head, gave, I think, not only the pleasure of a beautiful mechanical

toy, but something of the heart-pleasure which adults derive from convoying a little dog at the end of a string.

Nothing ever gave the child a more delightful feeling of virtuous complacency than that which would ensue when she had partially filled some pretty glass-topped box with fresh grass, and tenderly placed therein a grasshopper or two that she delighted to honour. For what could be more luxurious than to live in a glass-topped box?

The child had an especially friendly feeling for grasshoppers, based upon pleasant social relations, and upon something like esteem. Notwithstanding the shiftlessness traditionally ascribed to them, they seemed to her in some way meritorious insects, endowed with dispositions susceptible to kindness, and other homely virtues.

All creeping things she looked upon not only with the strongest physical repugnance, but with something like moral reprobation,

even more, perhaps, than she felt toward things that sting. It was a distinct drawback to butterflies that they had such wormlike bodies. And then, too, in spite of their painted wings, it was impossible for her to forget that, after all, they were only loathly caterpillars which had risen in the world. Petting, moreover, when it was occasionally essayed, brought about a too visible dilapidation; while with grasshoppers and the little spotted red beetles which the child called ladybugs, it merely produced a semi-cataleptic state, highly gratifying to her feelings as "tameness."

The child was very kind to ladybugs, always placing them, when the opportunity came in her way, in situations which best showed off their little scarlet coats. Once, for instance, she made for one of them a beautiful little moss house, leaving it roofless that she might enjoy the sight of the domestic felicity which she had provided.

The walls and floor were of the softest, richest green, interspersed with what seemed infinitesimal flowers; and there was in it a bit of gleaming mirror, which for the time was crystal water. (A fountain indoors seemed to the child the last extreme of elegance and luxury.) The ladybug itself lent a brilliant touch of scarlet to an *entourage* which the child felt it must find quite thrilling.

But ladybugs after all were deficient in animation and responsiveness, and would pall after a while. Then one would hold them out on the palm of one's hand and chant, —

"Ladybug, Ladybug, fly away home —
Your house is on fire! Your children will burn!"

till the tiny wings would unfurl themselves from under their coral sheaths, and the little dot of red would take its own path through the fields of air, following once more its own inscrutable purposes.

Of course, one admired lightning-bugs beyond measure, and chased them enthusiastically on summer nights. But anybody could catch lightning-bugs. To catch a bird, it seemed to the child, would be the height of bliss, — an achievement, an enrichment, a thrilling adventure, — and, incidentally, a rather good deed, as leading to the amelioration of the bird's natural condition, and its introduction to unknown luxuries and delights. It was cruel, though, she knew, to take a little bird out of a nest, "and grieve its mother's breast," no matter if the mother bird was rather selfish and short-sighted to object.

Once she had an opportunity of helping herself to a young bird and nobly refrained, or perhaps some prohibition was laid upon her by her elders. At any rate, she never forgot the endearing young charms of a nestful of baby woodpeckers which were domiciled in a tree down in

the orchard; their wide, yellow mouths, their little globular stomachs, revealing through singularly transparent skin an interesting view of the entire internal arrangements, the naïve confidence and appeal of their vociferous greetings — all was so wildly dear, so unpossessable!

Any grown-up bird, however, one was free to catch; and the child knew, of course, that all one had to do was to sprinkle salt on its tail; but somehow the salt and the bird were never at hand at the same time, and the child never caught a bird. With affectionate intent she also made rabbit traps; traps which were guiltless of interference with the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of any rabbit.

In default of wild things, pigeons and rabbits prosaically bought at market enjoyed her good offices and the opportunities which she provided of becoming acquainted with divers comforts and plea-

sures to which they had hitherto been strangers. And the sense of benefit conferred made them very dear to the child; so dear that one of the imperishable memories of childhood is the grief caused by the disappearance of a certain small gray pigeon, subsequently found hiding under a rosebush in the garden — apparently in an unaccountable effort to make its escape.

Playthings

6. Playthings

LIVE things, on the whole, were more pleasant to play with than lifeless ones; except those, perhaps, that made one pretend a good deal, like a certain handful of dried peas with which the child passed one absorbed and blissful afternoon. There was one little mottled pea, in particular, which performed some part so thrilling in the drama enacted that it permanently endeared itself to memory, though its precise rôle is long since forgotten.

For bought toys, after the first rapture of acquisition, the child, as a rule, cared comparatively little; not a great deal even for her dolls; although a certain so-called indestructible doll did, for some unknown reason, awaken an attachment which lasted,

I think, until she belied her commercial name by a violent end.

Only this doll and one other survive in memory with any vividness. The second was a small, stiff doll with an unremovable china poke-bonnet, whose old-fashioned quaintness earned for her the name of Mrs. Noah. This bonnet conferred distinction, but it acted at the same time as a barrier to affection, in that it invested Mrs. Noah with a shade of formality and aloofness, and prevented her from looking truly at home, no matter how unconventional and unstudied might be the state of the rest of her attire. It also inspired one with something of sympathetic fatigue. And there were not many pangs when Mrs. Noah was broken.

The most beloved of all dolls, I think, was a large paper "infant," to which the child was quite ardently attached. Indeed, all things considered, it was, perhaps, paper

dolls that the child really enjoyed most. For one thing, one might make them dresses by the easiest and most delightful processes, — by mere cutting and painting and pin-pricking. And then over all there was a delicious glamour of make-believe.

In things which were dolls to the child's imagination only, there was pleasure no less keen, although more transitory. Single hollyhocks, for instance, which could stand alone and wear with grace and distinction a green leaf shawl; morning-glories; syringa-blooms; little pink roses — these were potential dolls of the most satisfactory nature; perhaps the most fascinating of all dolls to play with when one played alone. The presence of other people seemed somehow to break the spell, and turn them into flowers again.

There was, indeed, peculiar delight in playing with things not primarily designed to be played with. The child had occa-

sional access to a physical laboratory, and there were things among the apparatus which seemed to her far more enticing than any possible toy in the most dazzling toy-store. There was, for example, a certain artfully poised horse and rider which she looked upon with exceeding wistfulness. There was also a Cartesian Diver which she considered would make a most entrancing doll.

Bought toys, as a rule, I repeat, gave little more than the mere pleasure of acquisition. Any simulation of life, however, made a toy enduringly interesting. A little squirming, wooden snake was highly valued by the child; as was a tiny turtle, poised on an invisible support, in a small glass-topped box, which was in itself a treasure; a little violently swimming turtle, forever bound for nowhere; as though the region under that square inch of glass were Looking-Glass Land, and, as it was with Alice

when she ran her best in that bewildering country, it took all the swimming *he* could do to stay in the same place!

Diminutive ducks and fishes which would swim around in a basin after a little magnetic rod in one's hand were, perhaps, the best of all the "store" toys, for they were not only "cute" by reason of their miniature proportions, and fascinating because of their apparent life, but they were in addition lovable, because of their manifestation of this seeming life in a show of intelligent docility. It was easy to think of them not only as alive, but as gratifyingly tame and affectionate.

A Noah's Ark the child considered a delightful toy; and it was one of which she did not speedily tire. There were too many permutations and combinations possible with the stiff little green trees, the vague quadrupeds, and the peg-like people; there was too much scope for a healthy

exercise of the imagination in deciding which was which and who was who.

A kaleidoscope was still more valued and longer enjoyed. The beautiful changing colours, the exquisite shifting symmetries of arrangement, the very way of viewing these ever-varying glories through a sort of peep-hole, with one eye shut and with an absolutely private and personal view, gave it a sort of enchantment.

The child did not know at all in advance what toys she would really care for when the novelty had worn off; and very probably the toy which of all others she most fervently desired would have speedily palled, if it had not been, for some now forgotten reason, unattainable to her. But she looked at it then, I remember, with a very ecstasy of longing. This was a white plaster tower, something like an un-Leaning Tower of Pisa, rather more than a foot high, perhaps, and with rows upon rows

of windows, through which the light would shine when one placed inside a lighted candle. That made its fascination. Seeing it so lighted, it was impossible not to think of it as furnished and inhabited; as full of life, festivity, and elegance, all on a fairy scale, — a rapturous conception not to be surpassed.

In the mere outshining of light from within there was something of poetic charm; something vitalising, as it were, to an object. This, and the added delight of colour made Japanese lanterns, or still more perhaps, candle-lit pasteboard boxes, fantastically cut out and lined with brilliant-hued tissue-paper, seem to her wonderfully beautiful. There was joy, too, in the thought that, as one carried them around after dusk in one's hand, one was, in that deliciously careless way, carrying fire in paper — which was thrilling to think of. One would have also, I think, a vague

feeling that fire itself had somehow grown tame and friendly; and this was very pleasant. But for all that, the tower was yet more ravishing.

Once the child saw a walking doll, owned by a lady she knew; saw it, after a good deal of preliminary winding and divers false starts, stalk entirely across the room, with a grim and menacing demeanour, and tumble down on the other side. But even this she did not covet as she did that delectable plaster tower; from which, nevertheless, in all probability she would have turned after a little space and betaken herself to building lordly pleasure-houses of dominoes, as had been her wont.

Portable Property

7. Portable Property

TO all children, I suppose, there is some more or less common and worthless thing in which there are believed to lie potentialities of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. Peach stones were invested by the child and the children she knew with this vague commercial value, and were collected from time to time with spasmodic industry; though they never did anything with them, so far as I can remember, except occasionally, in a fit of reckless extravagance and luxury, to crack one with a brick, and partake of the kernel. They were, however, distinctly property.

But the amassing of peach stones was a slow and plodding way of acquiring riches. The primrose path of speculation lay by way of the little paper prize-bags

which the children called cent-bags, from their market price. These were not only filled with pop-corn of uniform and unvarying staleness, but each held a gift from some generous person unknown, which, being an uncertain quantity, opened really glittering vistas to the imagination. A certain blue glass ring which issued thence was one of the child's most cherished possessions. This, however, was the fruit of a friend's good fortune, and not her own, which quite invariably took the shape of minute pewter or tinsel objects of indeterminate function.

As a pledge of friendship, merely, the ring would, of course, have had no mean value; but the child, besides, greatly admired glass. The first of all her treasures, in order of time, which presents itself to memory, is a small glass bottle, made beautiful by being filled with bright-coloured shreds and ravellings. These took on, with

the smoothness and lustre imparted by the lucid medium, an enhanced witchery of colour; but the lucidity which they emphasised was, after all, the essential charm of the whole.

Transparency is the great miracle of nature, I think, in the eyes of all children. Substances which may be seen through seem by that peculiarity to be set apart from other substances; to be held as less material, as more allied to the things of the invisible world. Only a short time ago, indeed, I heard a little boy quite promptly respond "Glass!" when he was asked, rather idly, the supposedly unanswerable question, what spirits are made of. But this feeling with regard to transparency is, of course, quite inarticulate. What the child — the particular child of whom alone I can profess to speak with even approximate certainty — would have said of glass and mica and dragon-fly

wings, was that they were "pretty;" though without doubt she would have dimly felt that the word did not sum up their full charm.

Bits of coloured glass with which one might change the whole face of nature were greatly esteemed; and prisms, broken or whole, even more. These last were not only beautiful in themselves, but magic almost in their power to make rainbows.

Upon the whole, glass-topped boxes were among the most desirable species of "portable property." Boxes, in themselves, appealed to her strongly: not only boxes with ribbon hinges, and handkerchief boxes with lovely ladies on them richly touched up with gilding, but even boxes that were just boxes (to the uninitiated) — like the famous primrose by the river's brim. But when the fascination of transparency was added, when one might see into a box with the top shut, and see things shut up

in it just as if the box were open, then there was a concatenation of delights which made it indeed a treasure. The beloved turtle, as I have said, was in a glazed box, and was made more precious thereby. To see it so clearly, so close at hand, and not to be able to touch it, invested it with an indescribable charm.

Fragments of mica were highly prized for the beauty and transparency of the sheets into which they might be split, and for the pleasure of splitting. Quartz pebbles were eagerly sought, and were held very precious; "rocks with fire in them" they were to the child — marvels of nature. Hardly less curious and valuable were the transparent locust-casts, complete even to the eyes, which one would sometimes find clinging with lifelike tenacity to a tree trunk — and would appropriate with really thrilling emotion.

The first chinquapins of the season

would come in just at the time of the child's birthday; and a long, lustrous, rich-brown string of them would be one of the delights of the day. The child would wind them about her neck and arms, and exult over their beauty with all the enjoyment of an Indian papoose in her beads, and with something of the same naïve pleasure, no doubt, in the consciousness of personal adornment — which hardly merited, I think, the name of vanity.

One would as reluctantly apply so harsh a term to the joy afforded her by a certain little straw hat with a wreath of pink roses around it, a joy which forever endeared it to recollection. One recalls, indeed, no sense of personal relationship toward it other than that of rapturous ownership in a thing so beautiful, so subtly expressive of the whole spirit of spring.

And then there was a pair of wings which testified to the fact that the child

had once been an angel. Perhaps she was, at the time of her appearance in this rôle, of a youth too extreme to appreciate the importance of the occasion, and the honour of a cherubic part in it. At any rate, it seems to have made singularly small impression upon her, for it is now utterly erased from memory. But the diaphanous wings which she wore remained to her as a rich and enduring legacy, and were, I think, the most precious of all her possessions.

8. Pomps and Vanities

ONCE the child had a long-handled paper fan which caused her really immoderate pride. Why she so plumed herself upon this particular fan does not now appear. Possibly it seemed to her exceptionally beautiful. Probably she had never had a fan before "to have, to have, to never give back," and its bestowal upon her was to her a sort of investiture, symbolic of increasing age and dignity. At any rate, her head was quite turned by its acquisition, and she grew at once restless for opportunities of display. It struck her as a most happy and opportune thing that just then a kind of family reunion was proposed. The child urged it warmly; for it would bring together all the children

of the connection, and they would see her fan!

The child, as I have said, did not actually remember being an angel; but there were the wings to prove that she had been one. It was a very nice thing, she thought, to have been an angel. And she had also other sources of pride; as, for example, in certain facts of the family history. Two circumstances, I remember, especially ministered to vainglory. One was that a near relative of hers was mayor of a small town; which, to the child's mind, was a dizzy height of greatness. The other was a really grewsome happening of her mother's youth: her discovering, under a bed, a would-be robber, who dropped in his flight a "great, long, awful knife" which proclaimed him to be a potential assassin as well. It was no slight thing, of course, to be able to assert a sort of proprietary interest in such an adventure as this.

The child was also rather proud of the fact that she was not particularly strong. To be sick always gave one a pleasant feeling of consequence; and to be spoken of as "delicate" was almost as flattering to one's vanity as to be taken for eight years old, say, when one was only six going on seven. Almost, but not quite. For age, after all, was the real touchstone of importance; the real basis of social classification.

It was only, of course, in the way of condescension and patronage that a "big girl" could associate with her inferiors of the child's circle; and the child and her friends were, in turn, debarred by self-respect from mingling upon equal terms with those much younger, or those who were in a lower reading-book; which was practically the same thing. For age-standing was not wholly a matter of chronology.

There was, for instance, a little girl whom the child knew, who went to school at home, and was not in any regular reader. And she had astonishingly precocious ways and precocious ideas; such as that it was n't "anything" to have a sweetheart. Clearly this little girl was practically very, very old; years older than those whom chronological records would make her contemporaries.

The child's admiration for this little girl was intense and fervid, not only on account of the glamour of age and fearful experience with which she had managed to invest herself, but also for a way she had of walking on the sides of her shoes, so as to produce a most fascinating twist in the heels. The child was not naturally imitative, but she tried faithfully for a while, I remember, to acquire this accomplishment, considering that it imparted to the carriage a peculiar dash and elegance. But, appar-

ently, only very superior persons could walk that way with ease and comfort, and she gradually abandoned, as too difficult, emulation even in the one point in which emulation seemed possible.

Social Divertisements

9. Of Social Divertisements

THE child, as I have said, was quite sure that she was a spitfire, but fortunately this character did not manifest itself under ordinary circumstances, and she and the little girls of her circle played together as a rule peacefully enough. There were, however, of course, from time to time differences of opinion among them which led to discussions more or less warm; for example, the question whether *delicious* or *deluscious* were the more correct and elegant expression was provocative of something like personal feeling; and a memorable controversy resulted from divergent views as to the merits or demerits of the flavour imparted by pigpens to the surrounding atmosphere. The really indignant astonishment of one

of the little girls at the perversity which could lead one to regard it as other than an agreeable fragrance seemed almost to remove the dispute from the realm of taste to the realm of morals. The child took no conspicuous part in either of these historic debates, she being probably of doubtful and divided mind.

The conversations in her circle, I think, were rarely languid and perfunctory. Conversation, indeed, was one of the chief of social pleasures; especially when there was contributing charm of circumstance and surrounding; as when, for instance, it was conducted from the tops of opposite gate-posts, or in the green heart of a tree. Much of it was audible day-dreaming, alternate soliloquising, introduced by the formula, When I am rich, or, When I am married — which were practically synonymous expressions. For all the little girls meant to be married some day, and to

marry fabulous wealth of course. Indeed it was a sort of game to pick out one's wedding-dress. The child's, I regret to say, was to be green satin trimmed profusely with tiny gold bells. To this she clung as her final and unalterable choice.

Imagination, it seemed to her, could go no further in the creation of the beautiful. And so this, I remember, was the costume chosen by her for another important occasion. Somehow she and two or three of her friends in town, perhaps at some time of house-cleaning, got temporary possession of an out-of-the-way room with a high bedstead in it from which the slats had been removed, and whose great feather bed had been let down upon the floor, and so left. The child and a friend climbed upon the headboard, and two others upon the footboard, and each in turn would make impressive proclamation, "I have got on so-and-so" — minutely describing

some most dazzling and beautiful costume. They would then, with the careful grace and dignity befitting their magnificence of attire, jump off, plunging into the billowy softness of the feather bed beneath; which for the time was the sea. Before each plunge there was a change to a new and if possible yet more gorgeous gown; though, in the child's case, the trailing green satin adorned with fairy golden bells, which was her first choice, gave a serene consciousness of being well-dressed not to be improved upon.

Airs and graces, I may say in passing, were appropriate under these circumstances, as always when one "played lady," but, as a general thing, "putting on" was a social crime not to be condoned. It would have been considered "putting on," I think, to have said *ragged* instead of the old, established *raggety;* to have called *Hi-spy I-spy*, or, in counting out for a

game, to have said so-and-so was *It*, instead of *Hit* — as everybody else did.

The child and her friends played, of course, all the immemorial games of childhood, and knew, without apparently ever learning them, all requisite rules and rhymes — some of which latter exercised over the child's mind the genuine poetic spell. When one went 'round and 'round, for example, singing,

"Green gravels, green gravels, your true love is dead;
He sent you a letter to turn back your head!"

a vague exquisite sadness seemed to diffuse itself around, and one's voice quite naturally took on a touching plaintiveness. A dead true love seemed to the child a most romantic and delightful thing; though she would have resented bitterly the imputation of a concrete and actual "sweetheart."

And then there was a certain counting-

out rhyme which appealed particularly to her imagination; a rhyme beginning with some rather melodious nonsense words, now, alas, obliterated from memory, and ending deliciously, —

> " One flew east, and one flew west;
> One flew over the curlew's nest.

What flew east and what flew west, she never had, I think, the slightest idea. But she felt no need of explicitness. It was enough to see in vision the darting of swift, shadowy wings across a great, beautiful, sunset sky.

" King William was King George's Son " was a game whose charm lay largely in the chant which went with it; which, by the way, one cannot help thinking was the rather obscure tribute of some small, inglorious laureate to the Queen's marriage. It is perhaps unnecessary to say that the verses in full run as follows, —

"King William was King George's son,
And all the royal race he run:
Upon his breast he wore a star,
And it was called the Star of War.

"Choose the east and choose the west,
Choose the one that you love best.

"Upon this carpet you shall kneel,
Sure as the grass grows in the field.—
Salute your bride and kiss her sweet,
And rise again upon your feet."

This hypothesis, at any rate, supplies a sort of link between the verses, which to the child's mind seemed to present a curiously abrupt and total change of subject. This and the trifling grammatical license in the second line (according to its usual reading) she recognised as blemishes. She would have preferred, too, that there should have been more about what she pictured to herself as an exciting sporting event, instead of the comparatively tame conclusion. For the royal racer at full

speed, adorned with his glittering Star of War, was a mental concept equally vivid and attractive. That alone was enough to offset any small defects, and to make this a decided favourite among " poetic " games.

Sometimes mere romping games were better still; such as Tag, and Catcher, and Prisoner's base, and Puss in the Corner; Blindman's Buff, and Dog on Wood, and Fox in the Warner All Come Over. — What the Warner is, or was, I confess I do not yet know. The obscurity of the expression, indeed, caused variants to multiply; among which were Fox in the Water, and Fox in the Walnut. None of these, however, notwithstanding their specious appearance of clarity, were quite convincing, and The Warner remained the really standard and accepted term.

The keenest fun of all, perhaps, was in games which were essentially practical jokes upon the uninitiated; one of the favourite

of which was, in substance, the preparation of an apparently luxurious, but practically bottomless seat, and the ceremonious assignment of it to some unsuspecting and rather flattered individual, the measure of whose ensuing chagrin determined the success of the game. For the child and her friends, it is needless to say, were as yet in the Dark Ages of humour and of mercy.

Sometimes just running was pleasure enough; particularly running up and down hill and running before a high wind, with one's skirts held outspread like a sail.

Then there were the things which one did fervidly and delightedly each in its own mysteriously ordained season, and never, by any chance, in any other; such as hoop rolling, rubber-ball bouncing, and jumping rope. There were also, of course, "parlour games" innumerable and of every grade of merit. None, however, approached the incredible depth of stupidity which seemed

to mark a game, or so-called game, which two of the child's grown-up cousins in the country used to play, off by themselves under one of the shady trees. So far as she could see, it consisted in sitting motionless for hours, staring down at the little table between them, and never saying a word. But she never went very near them, and there might, of course, have been other details.

Conduct

10. Conduct and Kindred Matters

THERE was a distinct tendency in the child and her friends toward casuistical discussion; a tendency which accounted in part, no doubt, for the nicety and precision of the ethical code which was recognised among them. For instance, to say "I wish I had it" of anything some one else had, was coveting. One must be very careful to say, "I wish I had one like it." And in like manner, other things, which to the superficial view seemed comparatively innocent, were held to be "the same as" quite heinous and deadly sins.

There was one little girl, in particular, whom one remembers as upholding an exalted moral standard. This little girl had a way of intoning the dreadful words,

"O-O-O, y-o-u've t-o-l-d a S-T-O-R-Y!" so as to strike a chill to the very marrow, not only of the offender, but even of the innocent bystander.

It was only as an innocent bystander, I am glad to say, that the child ever shivered under such a deliverance. And yet once the child told a story; a story of the unmitigated kind known to the coloured population as "pine black."[1] It happened in this wise: The child, then, I imagine, of very tender years, went to a party; and in some now forgotten way the terrible catastrophe befell her of having a little boy detailed to escort her home; or perhaps it was the little boy's own unconscious cruelty. How it came about mattered not at all to her. She did not, so far as I know, particularly blame the little boy, or look upon him otherwise than as a mere instrument of fate. I think, indeed, she concealed her

[1] Point blank.

anguish from him, and parted from him at the gate with a polite good-bye; though her heart was heavy within her at the thought of what awaited her at the hands of a cruel world.

When she went in, however, where "everybody" was, she was greeted by the question, "Why, how did you get home? Did Mr. X bring you?" (Mr. X was the husband of the lady who had given the party.) Instantly the thought flashed into her mind that nobody knew, and nobody would ever know if she only said Yes. It was very easy to say just Yes. So the child said "Yes,"—said it as if she had been telling stories all her life. It was wonderfully easy. And nothing whatever happened to her; she did not even have to tell another "lie," as her reader would have called it, to support the first. Even the subsequent pangs of conscience were comparatively light. But any other course, she

knew, would have brought upon her the calamity of having the little boy assigned to her as a sweetheart; and mortal peril, as she instinctively apprehended, excuses much.

Still, it was not a pleasant thing to think about afterwards. And this was not the only deplorable episode brought about by her stringent ideas of propriety, and her aversion to being teased. Which tragedy came first, it is now impossible to say; but in this last-mentioned case, I know, the child was very small indeed, — too small to go anywhere alone; for upon that fact the occurrence hinged.

For some reason, one Sunday, there was no member of the family to take her to Sunday School; and so the obvious plan suggested itself of sending her in the care of a boy who lived in the house with her, and whose own Sunday School lay somewhat in the same direction. He was a boy considerably older than the child, and

a very good friend of hers, in an elder-brotherly sort of way. It was he, indeed, who had bestowed upon her the blue glass ring which was one of her chief treasures. But a public appearance with him was another matter, — a thing to excite remark, notwithstanding his comparatively venerable age, and his footing of family friend. So, flatly and stubbornly, the child refused to go with him, — unaccountably refused, as it seemed to her elders. Certainly it seemed a case of pure obstinacy, of wanton rebellion against rightful authority; which finally asserted itself by resort to a mild equivalent of Solomon's rod. Then the child suffered a veil to be tied over her tear-stained countenance, and set out with the boy; who as they went along entertained her with a flow of light and agreeable small talk; politely ignoring all preceding incidents and such remaining symptoms of discomposure upon her part as a tendency

to chew her veil, and to breathe in an irregular and convulsive manner.

The child did not think she deserved to be punished that time; and yet the punishment left behind it no bitterness. Perhaps she was sustained by the thought that she was no ordinary culprit, but was, in a way, a martyr to principle. Perhaps she was aware, in some inarticulate manner, that even if her punishment had been a mistake there had been no wrath, caprice, nor willing injustice in its infliction. Chiefly, however, without doubt, it was that there is a profound repose and satisfaction which follows "as the day the night" submission to "awful rule and right authority."

One remembers only one other instance of like punishment—of any punishment, indeed—in all childhood. The child had been "fractious," I think, for some little time; had been in that state of mind which her nurse would have graphically described

as "spilin' for a whippin';" and at last she was overtaken by the visitation of justice. What her specific misdeed was, I cannot now recall. All is to the last degree hazy, except the *finale* of Sabbath calm, of unutterable content, of love for all mankind. The child had had in her pocket a slate pencil of exceptional value; a slate pencil covered for half its length with red and blue plaid paper. This, during the few stormy moments preceding, had been accidentally broken; but even this disturbed not at all her delicious sense of peace, her exquisite beatitude of spirit.

She had been bad, but that was atoned for, and now she was good. The sense of being good never, I think, so flooded her consciousness and thrilled her with pleasure as just then. I can recall, indeed, no other marked instance of feeling "good;" nothing more than an occasional rather comfortable feeling of beneficence result-

ing from some trifling act of kindness, or fancied kindness, and the passing glow attending some childish magnanimity, such as now and again marked the intercourse of the little group to which she belonged.

A more or less vague sensation of wickedness, on the other hand, as I have already intimated, was apt to be a concomitant of any mood of sombreness whatever, as of awe, or home-sickness. This was wholly independent of outside suggestion, and even, I think, of the child's antecedent conduct. Perhaps the effect upon the conscience of any depressing influence was, in a measure, reflex and fortuitous. When one had been bad one felt rather miserable; and conversely, when one felt rather miserable one was apt to feel "bad." And yet I cannot feel that this accounts entirely for this haunting undefined compunction, which was, as it were, a formless shadow rising from dim depths beneath conduct — from the

elemental, the essential. There was, at all times, I think, a subconscious intuition of something subtly amiss in her own nature; an intuition ever ready to rise into consciousness when her thoughts from any cause should be thrown back upon self.

11. Dreams and Reveries

CASTLE-BUILDING, as I have said, was a favourite occupation of the child and her friends; but it was castle-building distinctly limited in scope and variety, consisting almost wholly of splendid plans for the time "when I am rich," or "when I am married;" which, I repeat, were perfectly interchangeable expressions. Generally these discussions narrowed down to rather minute details regarding one's gorgeous future establishment and one's prospective gowns. The child's boudoir, for example (she thought it very fine to call it a boudoir), was quite clear in her mind. Rather a coolness, in fact, arose between herself and one of her friends because of the latter's unaccountable

lack of appreciation of the colour scheme which she had selected.

Alone, her dreams took a wider range, and concerned themselves not only with the future, but with the present and the past, building upon the actual a superstructure of make-believe. But fact and fancy remained, as a rule, distinct enough in her mind to be in no way confounded. Once, however, the child found herself embarked upon a minute account of a wholly fictitious experience — an alleged visit to a certain beautiful house which was her ideal of what a house should be, and as such very familiar to her dreams; found herself, quite gratuitously, "telling a story," and checked herself, inexpressibly shocked at her own wanton and inexplicable wickedness — the recollection of which continued to be an enduring source of self-distrust.

One of the clearest of all recollections is of a day-dream, if one may call that a

day-dream which happened to come at night. It was the night of a Christmas eve, and the child was lying wide-awake, in a state of delicious excitement, thinking with all her might about Christmas presents. There were delightful certainties to look forward to; and for awhile she revelled in anticipations of what the morning was sure to bring her. But one's mind, when it is particularly active, cannot rest in certainties; and she began to consider possibilities. What a fine thing it would be if somebody she had not thought of at all, somebody who never had given her anything, should send her a lovely present!

It was a fascinating idea, which gradually assumed more and more of concreteness. Suppose Miss —— should send her something! Miss —— might conceivably do any sweet and pleasant thing. Why might she not send the child a Christmas present? There was no reason in the

world why she might not, but many reasons why she might. One, however, was not relying on reasons. One had a strong and growing presentiment that she would send; that she had sent; that she had sent something beautiful, which one would get in the morning; that she had sent it in a basket, by a boy,—by a boy named John Johns. The child had never heard of any boy named John Johns; and that made her all the surer that it was a real, sure-'nough presentiment.

The next morning is indistinguishable from any other Christmas morning; which indicates perhaps that nothing unusual happened.

A halo of dreams was a veritable part of her life. Almost as real as any other of her childish possessions remains a little floating car which she constructed for herself in imagination; a little car rather like a glorified two-seated bread-tray, pictured always

as gliding upstairs high in mid-air, or suspended after the manner of Mohammed's coffin. The irksomeness of stair-climbing during some passing fit of languor or weakness probably suggested the car, and the idea was too delightfully redolent of fairy-land ever to be abandoned.

So too, to dispel the tedium of church, it was a well-established habit of the child's to take mental possession of the bonnets of the congregation, and to occupy herself in fitting them upon her doll, — after reducing them to an appropriate and fascinating smallness. Her doll was, of course, at home, decorously put away for Sunday; but it never, I think, at any other time, gave her pleasure quite so keen and engrossing. It was also a pleasure when the plate was passed, to deposit upon it, mentally, a million-dollar note; for there was nothing paltry and circumscribed about these ideal transactions.

The clouds, as I have mentioned, were a part of her domain, lordly pleasure-grounds to which she often transported herself in fancy, with a vividness of realisation which brought with it something of the deep refreshing of an actual and delectable change of air and scene. One morning, in particular, I remember, she was sitting out on the porch steps which led into the flowery side-yard of her home, and gazing up into the sky, which was full of soft, white, piled-up clouds — when the thought came that that day was a holiday, and with it the swift and joyous determination to spend it watching the clouds, and imagining herself among them, resting upon their softness, climbing their snowy summits, and revelling in their loveliness.

Rather dimly I remember Space and Time as subjects of fascinating, bewildering, almost self-torturing reverie, reverie which lost one, as it were, in a void infinity. I

remember also the curiously similar frame of mind induced by repeating a word, any word, until it became meaningless; until it was blotted out by a mere indescribable weirdness. All who have read Tennyson's Life, by his son, must recall the remarkable description, in the poet's own words, of the trancelike state into which, from boyhood up, he would pass upon silently repeating his own name three or four times. And elsewhere he says:

> "More than once when I
> Sat all alone, revolving in myself
> The word that is the symbol of myself,
> The mortal limit of the self was loosed
> And passed into the nameless, as a cloud
> Melts into Heaven."

But, as I have said, the child's name had nothing to do with what I cannot help thinking a cognate state, and was never in any instance, so far as I can recall, the word experimented with. Any common

every-day word whatever, said over and over to one's self, when one was quite alone, would suddenly become strange, unreal; and for a flash of time the solid earth would seem to be melting from under one's feet. There was, however, none of the rapture and exaltation of the poet's far more vivid experience. He, as it will be remembered, says:

"Out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life. . . . This might be the state which St. Paul describes, 'Whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot

tell.' . . . I am ashamed of my feeble description. Have I not said the state is utterly beyond words? But in a moment, when I come back to my normal state of 'sanity,' I am ready to fight for *mein liebes Ich*, and hold that it will last for aeons of aeons."

With the child, there was only a swift sense of vacuity, of loss of hold upon the actual, carrying with it a not unpleasing touch of horror; a sensation only worthy of mention in this connection for the similarity, and the difference, of the mode of causation.

Bugbears

12. Bugbears

THE child, when she came to the age of composition-writing, always began a disquisition by saying, "There are many kinds of —" whatever it was that was under consideration. All the varieties which one could painfully muster — which seemed suddenly to have dwindled to an extreme fewness — were then enumerated with as much verbiage as possible, and in a large and straggling hand. This would usually bring one quite in sight of the desired haven, the end.

But aside from the exigencies of composition, I may say that with the child there were many kinds of bugbears; many things, that is, which, in the language of the dictionary, excited "needless terror" — or needless horror, I venture to add, to

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make the word inclusive enough for all the child's especial *bêtes noires.*

First of all, there were the dog-catchers. One of the most terrible sights of those early years was that of a great cage lumbering through the street, a crowd of hapless dogs gazing out through the wires with innocent unconcern. It represented to her mind fiendish cruelty. It was also a reminder of the existence of a class of persons whose business in life was "catching" people and things — a fact of which she was already but too well persuaded. The verb "to catch" was indeed indissolubly associated with the nefarious activities of liers-in-wait for erring or unfortunate children, and carried with it a fearful wealth of suggestion. Precisely what it implied in this connection, she never determined, nor sought to determine; but it is certain that the term lost nothing by its vagueness.

Bugbears

Her heart quite bled for the hapless dogs overtaken by a fate so dreadful. But she did not like dogs, even very tiny little dogs who would run after one out of pure frivolity; as the one did, no doubt, which frightened her one day into shrieking wildly and flying across the street, just under the windows of her uncle's house, to which she was going. And this uncle, kind as he was (it was he who made her beautiful box-lanterns), had a fearful propensity for joking. But she recovered breath, smoothed down her ruffled plumage, and went upstairs sedately. And clearly he had no suspicions; for he expressly said, "What was that little coloured girl down there screaming about just now?" which relieved her mind a good deal. For above all things she detested being laughed at.

The child, I repeat, was afraid of many things, — of everything which could bite or

gore or chase, or hiss at one (geese indeed were an especial terror); but many of her bugbears bore no relation whatever to her personal safety. One of the chief of these was represented by a mere bent picket in an iron railing around a house near her home. Tradition had it that a mad bull, breaking loose in the street and starting upon a fierce onslaught upon society, had in its blind fury impaled itself upon this spiked fence, — upon that particular spike, — and that the rust upon it was blood. The child never saw it, I think, without becoming limp in her knees; and to this day the one who was the child is now and again pursued in dreams by an infuriated cow, and seeks refuge in some wretched little house into which the beast is always about to break with perfect ease — when waking comes.

But the terror of wild bulls suggested by that fearful spike was a secondary

consideration. There was an indescribable torture in the idea that it had pierced living flesh, and that there was blood upon it. Once, I remember, the child was all alone when something happened to recall to her an account she had overheard of somebody's having been badly hurt, — who or how, I have forgotten, — and suddenly a curious, unbearable agony took possession of her; and it became mysteriously necessary to reach out and hold to something; though, I may say in passing, she did not faint then, and never but once in all her after life.

Quite a surpassing horror was the actual sight of a little dog lying dead in an alley with a stream of blood from its mouth. The gruesome spectacle seemed to print itself on her brain, and to invade every scene and circumstance of life; darkening all with its own loathliness and pity. This was worse than seeing the hairiest and leg-

giest possible worm; though even an ordinary worm was to the child a highly shudder-producing object.

Almost as bad was the spectacle which she accidentally encountered one day of a headless chicken hopping horribly on the ground, — an apparition forever unforgettable, forever horrible, utterly irreconcilable, for years, with any predilection for chicken as an article of diet.

One almost forgot the bull and the dog and the chicken after awhile, however, but ghosts were an abiding bugbear, — though one knew, of course, that there were no such things. There was perhaps no more acute suffering in all childhood than from this source; and I should like to entreat for all children an exemption from the "needless terror" awakened by these tales, a terror with which the immature reason is wholly unable to cope. The over-stimulated imagination of a child requires no

warrant for the bugbears it evokes and for a time invests with reality. Not a few of the things which the child thought of with uneasiness were quite unheard-of and preposterous, as she would have acknowledged with perfect readiness, and with no diminution whatever of the discomfort which the thought of them produced. But it never occurred to her to speak of what I may call her fantastic terrors, the chance shapes assumed by the formless fear so apt to arise in all children when the imagination has been markedly excited.

Once, I remember, she was alone in an unused out-of-the-way room in her own home, sitting upon the floor, sailing a little paper boat in a basin. In the water she had put scraps of paper of various shapes and sizes to represent sea-monsters. She had amused herself absorbingly for a long time blowing the boat about and pretending that the passengers and crew were

afraid of the whales and sea-serpents, when suddenly, without visible reason, it sank. All at once it seemed to her that it was "coming true"—the sea, the ship, the sea-monsters; that she might be overwhelmed then and there by the horror-haunted waters; and she fled, panic-stricken.

Sometimes she shivered on the brink of her bath with the thought that it might, without warning, turn into a narrow, infinitely deep dependency of the ocean—into a bottomless pit of dark water, perfectly accessible to the sea-serpent; which occupied no small place in the child's imaginings. Almost as fearful, in a different way, was the thought which came to her sometimes when she was alone with a rocking-chair, that all at once it might begin to rock—which she felt was really more than she could possibly bear.

Nothing indeed was more unpleasant than the thought of any betrayal of fur-

tive life by things that ought to be dead. Lead pipes, for instance, occasionally made one distinctly uncomfortable — so very little would be needed to turn them into snakes!

It seems strange to me now that with all her horror of transformations, and particularly of snaky transformations, she should have watched with warm sympathy and approval the long-continued efforts of two of her boy-cousins to raise snakes on a large scale by soaking horse-hairs in a barrel of water, whose stagnant smell, inextricably associated with an awed sense of the occult, is an undying memory. But about all this, rather occult as it undeniably was, there was not, she considered, overwhelming mystery; for the change was to be brought about by a sort of recipe, almost as if one were making a pudding. And the snakes were to be every-day snakes, like those of the woods and fields, not the nameless, shadowy creatures indigenous to

gloom and obscurity, which were the serpents most unpleasantly intrusive upon the imagination,—although one did not believe in them, of course. Of real, authentic snakes she had no especial fear, though she shuddered with physical repulsion at their "creepiness;" so little fear that she, with another child, once found wholly delightful excitement in assisting as spectators at a battle royal in the woods between a black snake and a moccasin, to which they were attracted by the rattle and clatter of fiercely threshed leaves, and the sun's glitter upon the coiling combatants.

The child at times, I think, rather invoked these fantastic fears, by saying to herself, for the luxury of a slight shudder, "s'pose" so-and-so should happen—something interestingly uncanny; for a mere touch of horror, as everybody knows, is agreeable enough. And then the "scary" idea she had summoned was not always

easily dismissed; but on the contrary remained, not seldom, to tyrannise over her mind quite painfully. Then again these disquieting fancies would sometimes come upon her without apparent reason, in the midst of fascinating make-believe which seemed to hold no hint of the weird. And one would be constrained forthwith to fly the solitude which bred such spectres, and seek cheerful human company.

13. Handicraft

THE child was far from possessing any marked degree of manual dexterity, but she often made playthings for herself which quite fulfilled their purpose of ministering to her own personal delectation. The crudest, perhaps, but by no means the least effective of these was what she called a "balloon," which was merely a triangular piece of tissue paper tied at the three corners to strings which met in the child's hand. One had but to run in a high wind, and it puffed and pulled and rose finely. Kites, too, she attempted sometimes; upon the whole, with indifferent success. But as even "a dead leaf in a wind may soar like a bird," their characteristic inertia was occasionally overcome, and they made short swallow-flights which

afforded her great pride and pleasure. Bows and arrows, she also constructed, and enjoyed; getting eminently satisfactory results from such simple raw material as a piece of barrel-hoop, a string, and an umbrella rib.

Of course, she made larkspur rings, and rings of the tiny purple blooms of sheep-mint, bur baskets and leaf baskets, "hoppergrass carriages" of the long, pliable stems of the narrow-leaf plantain interwoven upon her fingers, thistle-bloom umbrellas, chains of dandelion stalks and clover blossoms, and manipulated paper so as to evolve caps and boats and boxes and chickens and windmills and snappers and other delightful things.

Paper dolls she also made; but one could buy much prettier ones. So, as a general thing, she bought her dolls, and contented herself with fabricating for them elaborate wardrobes, and suits of household furniture

consisting of chairs, tables, and beds, capable of standing alone in a shaky and uncertain manner.

The joy of making never came to her so strongly as in the creation of the beautiful; as when, for instance, she cut small, stout ladies from a lump of fuller's earth, and coloured them in rainbow tints — or, rather, tints as prismatic as could be yielded by a paint-box reduced to something of muddy uniformity by the child's habit of effecting any desired combination of colours by dabbling a wet brush first on one cake and then on the other.

The interest of making these artless figurines was undoubtedly increased by the circumstance that at any moment there might come sudden disintegration to the substance in which she wrought; or, at least, a disastrous splitting off of the particular member upon which she was engaged. To this peculiarity of the medium in which

they were developed was due their marked solidity of structure, — a peculiarity which allied them closely to the traditional Dutch type.

These were not dolls to the child, not things to be played with, but works of art, objects of *vertu*, for mere contemplation and cherishing; or, more generally, for solemn bestowal upon some favoured friend. Of like nature were the little books cut out of gypsum which some of her acquaintances displayed, to the child's admiring envy. I do not remember that she herself ever carved one of these highly prized volumes; not having, I suppose, the necessary material.

There was nothing, perhaps, among the multitude of beautiful things at the annual Agricultural Fair, which seemed to her quite so entrancing as the wax-work. The flowers, the fruit, the luncheons (complete even to a glass of wine, or a foaming mug

of beer) were to her marvels of human ingenuity and skill, which she was moved to emulate.

For awhile her small funds were quite absorbed in the purchase of the little gaily tinted sheets of wax in which there lay such enchanting possibilities. One can never forget the delight which there was in the pure colours, in the smooth, exquisitely yielding surfaces. I recall, however, but dimly any joy of achievement in this direction; though fuchsias, susceptible of recognition, she certainly succeeded in making. Doubtless she was chilled and discouraged by a sense of the distance which lay between such modest accomplishment and the masterpieces which had fired her fancy and aroused her ambition. Despairing of reaching this pinnacle, — or becoming by some means aware that even the most marvellous creations in wax were regarded with some indifference by

those around her — she gradually abandoned this branch of art.

Glass-blowing she undertook, after seeing an exhibition of its fairy-like products, and, at the cost of repeatedly burned fingers, succeeded in, to the extent of spinning an occasional thread between two halves of a broken medicine-tube, held in the flame of the gas.

Wood-carving she also took up in a small way; devoting herself particularly to the production of miniature knives, forks, and spoons. A set consisting of these three pieces seemed to her a very chaste and appropriate present for a friend. It was, indeed, delicately expressive of a willingness to take trouble for the recipient; for the making was not unattended with difficulties when one was working with a chronically dull knife on wood decidedly given to splintering. The fork, in particular, was not to be "pronged" without

almost desperate risk. But these uncertainties, of course, really made the process all the more interesting.

Toward needlework she had no great inclination; though it was pleasant enough, sometimes, to sew for one's doll in a circle of similarly employed friends, who discussed ways and means together, jointly confronted difficulties, and admired each other's work. Doll's dress-making was not exacting. All one had to do was to sew together, in a sketchy way, the edges of a piece of goods, run a straggling gathering string in the top, hem or scallop the bottom, cut arm-holes, add a shawl or *fichu* and a sash, and the costume was complete.

There must have been, as a rule, an embarrassing scrappiness in the supply of material — it happened so often that dresses must, of necessity, approach the extreme limit of permissible shortness. The most

common of all accidents was that they should overstep this limit, and be found too short to "do." Quite invariably, I think, some member of the circle would hold up her doll when she tried its dress on, and distressfully inquire if the garment were not too short. Obviously anything but reassurance was out of the question; and the child finally hit upon a convenient formula for all such occasions. "Not," she would say, "with *very* pretty drawers!" This served perfectly for awhile; but, one day, when she placidly administered this consolation, the little girl addressed retorted with the manifestly unfair and uncalled-for question, "But how do you make very pretty drawers?" a question which seemed to the child to reveal a want of tact and *savoir faire* which was really deplorable.

Once the child was staying with a lady who was teaching her children to sew; and the lady gave her, too, a task,—that of

hemming one side of something which abides in recollection as a sheet; which it may or may not have been. The other side was already hemmed, probably by the lady herself.

It was a tedious undertaking to traverse by the slow progression of stitches the formidable distance between one corner and another; but the child set herself doggedly to reach her goal and at last reached it. But perhaps she had considered her stitches too exclusively as steps toward freedom; perhaps she had unconsciously assumed seven-league boots, as it were; for when she had finished her hem the lady told her to pick it out!

It seemed very strange to the child; for she herself could see nothing wrong in the work, which she obediently set herself to demolish. But, of course, the lady knew better than she, and it must be very, very bad. Anyhow there was comfort in the

thought that there would remain no tangible evidence of her mortifying failure. It was almost with renewed cheerfulness that she picked out the very last stitch of the long, long hem, and handed back the sheet, or whatever it was, to the lady. The lady looked at it, and looked at the child. "My dear," she said, "you've picked out the wrong hem!"

Upon the whole, the child had no very roseate impression of "plain sewing." "Fancy work," however, as represented by the adornment of perforated cardboard with bright-coloured worsted stitches, was different and altogether agreeable. A delightful neatness and precision of effect was attainable without trouble, through the guidance of the holes, and one's stitches might be as long as one chose! A simple cross-stitch border in red or blue, and an affectionate motto to match, down the centre, were all that was necessary to turn

a strip of cardboard (preferably silver) into an ideal " keepsake."

It was peculiarly pleasant to make " keepsakes " and things designed as gifts, in that one might reasonably look forward to a climax of gratitude and applause. But really appreciative spirits, as the child found, are sadly few. How often one was surprised and chilled by a touch of obtusity even in one's best friends; by something strangely stolid and matter-of-course in their reception of things which to one's own eyes were yet rare and radiant with the glamour of creation!

School

14. School, Slightly Considered

SCHOOL bored the child, and she early developed a fatal facility for more or less complete mental abstraction from its irksome routine; a fact which accounts, I suppose, for the dimness of the impression left by this side of her life.

Very clearly, though, may be recalled what seems to have been her first writing-lesson. The teacher made a row of small r's across the top of the child's slate, for her to imitate; and the child applied herself to her task with enthusiasm, and a really keen desire to excel. She meant to do her very best. She might even, she thought, do better than the teacher herself, for the child did not altogether admire

the teacher's r's. They were disfigured, she considered, by having a sort of little horn on top, which was due, no doubt to accident. Certainly they would look much better if they were neatly squared off. So the child laboriously filled her slate with r's of a new and improved pattern, in which the objectionable feature was carefully omitted; and then, very happily, — for the result, she felt, fully justified her judgment in the matter, — she handed up her slate for the applause, which, alas, quite failed to follow.

The first reading-lesson, which related to A CAT, also retains its place in memory; or rather the rapture which ensued when she had mastered it, and felt that now, at last, she could read. This delight was wholly undimmed by any consciousness of limitation in her new power.

The child had known that she should love to read. She had quite made up

her mind before this, indeed, that she would never pass a sign in the street, or a scrap of printed paper, without reading it, when once she was able. And literature, as represented by the stories in her reading-books, did not at all disappoint her. These stories not only delighted her, but were, I think, a potent factor in the child's moral development. No product of human genius, I am convinced, ever made a deeper impression upon her for good than the harrowing history of the bad little boy who threw stones at an unoffending stranger of unprepossessing appearance, who turned out to be a long-lost uncle coming home with a gold watch in his pocket for the bad little boy. The bad little boy, of course, forfeited the watch, and was forced to "hang his head" at the otherwise joyful family reunion. To be obliged to hang one's head seemed to the child quite the acme of ill-

fortune; none the less, perhaps, that the words always called up a vague vision of a perfectly detached head dangling at the end of a string.

The moral, expressed or implied, did not in the least detract from these tales; it rather, I think, added a charm, in that one had in reading them a certain glow of conscious virtue. For the child knew that *she* never threw stones at anybody, or took things that were not hers, or played truant, or went swimming on Sunday — which were the ever-besetting sins of the reading-book juveniles.

At the same time, I repeat, these stories were, on the whole, of distinct benefit to her; as, for instance, the Bad-Little-Boy-and-Uncle-with-the-Gold-Watch story (I regret that the precise title has escaped me) stood for the child as a warning that appearances are often delusive; that one's sin is very apt indeed to find one out;

and that highly unpleasant consequences may be confidently expected to follow.

But stated thus baldly, the child, even in her first intoxication with print, might have turned from these valuable truths. She might have rejected unadorned admonition with something of the impatience of a little girl whom she knew long afterwards. This little girl was spelling her way through a page of precepts, such as, —

"Be gen-tle to all.
Al-ways speak the truth.
Do not slam the door and make a loud noise a-bout the house.
Do not at the ta-ble eat in a greed-y man-ner like a pig."

Suddenly she shut her book with a wrathful bang, and the spirit of '76 blazed up in her. "This old third reader sha'n't boss *me!*" she said defiantly.

This very little girl was keenly alive to the power and pathos of the fiction of her

reading-book, and to its moral bearings. Conveyed in the form of mildly exciting anecdotes of little girls and boys who did or did not do those particular things, these warnings would have been received with the utmost meekness. She would have rejoiced at the just fate which overtook Greedy George or Heedless Harry; she would have thrilled when the virtuous conduct of Truthful Mary caused her mother to "drop a tear." There were few things, by the way, more affecting to the child's imagination than this oft-dropped parental tear; which she instinctively pictured to herself as single, pear-shaped, and of heroic size.

It was not as reading-lessons that the child enjoyed these tales, but as mere privately imbibed literature, which involved no responsibilities of rendition. To read aloud to a critical, or supposedly critical, audience was a very different matter. Perhaps the

most painful memory of school is that of a certain reading-lesson which one had to stumble on with after a class of "great big" girls had come into the room, and were sitting around listening to one's pitiful efforts. The word "shut" in particular, I remember occasioned frightful difficulties, by becoming inextricably mixed up with the word "shirt" in the child's mind, so that it seemed quite impossible to pronounce it any other way. As for its meaning, it might have been anything or nothing, so far as the child was concerned; since the "great big" girls had come in words had quite ceased to have any special meaning. Reading under these circumstances was little less than agony. The child was so acutely uncomfortable that it occurred to her that she had a headache, which always made her free to leave school. So she paused in her halting rendition of "James Wilson, the Truant Boy," or other

improving history, and said to the teacher, "I've got a headache."

The teacher smiled. "Isn't it rather sudden?" she said. This hurt the child a good deal; first, as a most unfounded and astonishing imputation; and secondly, upon reflection, as a view of the matter for which there was really something to be said. Like Paolo and Francesca, the child read no more that day. But she could not help wondering whether she had had a "sure 'nough" headache after all. Anyhow, it seemed to her that it was a very cruel world.

The child, I remember, "got her lessons" by swaying and beating her breast, and saying the words over to herself in a piercing whisper; afterwards supplementing the knowledge thus acquired by judicious guessing. And in the course of time she found herself possessed of a modest capital of more or less hazy facts about reigns and administrations and wars and inventions;

modes and tenses and cases and number; boundaries and capitals and climates and productions; and the things one must do to get the answers in the back of the arithmetic. But the most, I am sure, that school ever did for her, then or afterwards, was to give her the key to the world of books.

15. Books

THE child knew that she should love books; and she did love them, with a naïve impartiality. Nothing could have been more catholic than her taste. There was in print some occult enchantment not now to be understood. It almost seems, on looking back, that she was incapable of being bored by any printed thing. Johnson's "Rambler," I remember, she found a well-spring of delight, and "Proverbial Philosophy" she revelled in. At the same time she was keenly alive to the charms of more lurid literature; such as she once caught alluring glimpses of in an odd number of a certain "family" story-paper, thrown in at the gate upon the principle that whoever dipped into its romances must obtain the rest at any hazard.

The child, alas, never did obtain the rest; albeit her longing for the end of the story for awhile quite poisoned her peace. The exquisitely beautiful heroine, at some most exciting juncture, had just drawn a silver dagger — when the account cruelly broke off. It was altogether in vain that the child petitioned for the complete story as the Christmas present which she would prefer to all others — Christmas being then at hand. Probably this petition led to a prohibition of this form of fiction; for this seems to have ended, as it had probably begun, her acquaintance with it.

Upon the whole, however, she enjoyed a large, and I cannot help thinking, wise measure of liberty, and read a strange jumble of things, ranging from "Alice in Wonderland" to Hannah More; from fairy tales to Fox's "Book of Martyrs;" from the old-fashioned Gems and Annuals and Books of Beauty which had accumulated

in the large and rather heterogeneous home library, to "Don Quixote" and the "Iliad."

Occasional verbal no-thoroughfares troubled the child very little. Sooner or later, one would catch up with the sense again, and what difference did it make about small details by the way? Much indeed which the child read must have taken quite a personal imprint from the free impressionism of her method; and effects were not seldom produced, I suppose, which would have been slightly surprising to the author. I remember, for instance, that it rather disturbed her that a certain boy-character of whom she was disposed to think well should have given "sundry" pieces of cake to his friends. It seemed to argue a certain closeness of disposition to have hoarded the cake until it became sun-dry before dispensing it. But there were no doubt, she reflected, extenuating circumstances.

One day the mysterious word "'em" kept occurring in a book she was reading. Once she ignored it. Twice she ignored it. Three times, and more perhaps, she mentally eliminated it from the sentence, and made what sense she could of the remainder. But like Banquo's ghost it would not down. So she paused and seriously considered; and solved the problem triumphantly by deciding that it must be an eccentric way of spelling *Me*. After this she went on comfortably enough.

Why "Anne of Geierstein" should be persistently linked in memory with this etymological struggle, it is hard to say; for surely there are no "'em's" in its stately colloquies. And besides, to have thrilled as she did with this, the first of the Waverley Novels to fall into her hands, the child must have measurably vanquished the difficulties of printed language; so that the connection in time cannot be very close.

That of place, however, probably explains it. The out-of-the-way stair-step upon which she sat to read "Anne of Geierstein," and which was ever after redolent of its magic, had been, no doubt, the scene of her encounter with that redoubtable "'em;" and in time these memories merged.

Scott's novels were to her, I need not say, thrilling from the first appearance of the Two Horsemen to the distant end. "Ivanhoe" she loved best of all; though it seemed to her a decided pity that Rebecca did not in the end marry Front de Bœuf, of whom, for some inexplicable childish reason, she heartily approved.

Cooper, also, added a new joy to childhood; for the sake of which the one who was the child loves him to-day with a curious warmth of gratitude which would not have his least device of wood-craft flippantly discredited. To him, doubtless, was largely due her warm espousal of the noble red

man's cause. "The White Man's Treatment of the Indian," was, I remember, the subject she chose once for a composition, feeling that she could pour out quite a lava-flood of burning eloquence; though this, as it turned out, was a mistake, and one, as usual, strung out reluctant sentences with a wistful eye upon the goal.

"Logan's Lament," which was in her reading-book, contributed no little to her indignant sense of pale-face turpitude. Consummate pathos is represented in memory by this, and by certain extracts from "Julius Cæsar," which was read to her in part before she herself was capable of reading it. The child quite suffered on Cæsar's account; but it was a delicious pain, which she would not have foregone.

Her nascent sense of humour was most appealed to, perhaps, by the more broadly comic situations in Dickens and the rough-and-tumble fun of Lever. But she was

only incidentally amused, I think, with any story. The plot was the thing, the romantic interest, the clearing up of difficulties, the outburst of happiness at the end. It was Dickens' generous meting out of poetic justice, the glow left in one's heart by his deliciously happy endings, more even than the fact that he made her laugh consumedly, which especially endeared him to the child, and made her fix upon him as her "favourite author."

"The Lady of the Lake" was with equal definiteness chosen as her favourite poem. Later, however, "The Ancient Mariner" displaced it in her affection. This poem had for her a fascination which she never attempted to explain.

Comparatively soon after she made the acquaintance of A CAT she seems to have launched out upon the great sea of literature with an artless confidence and a fine scorn of limitations; though there must have

been some interval of confinement to the shallow waters of juvenile books. In retrospect, however, one can see no well-marked stages; childish things and things unchildish seem inextricably mingled. The child, I think, must have accepted without prejudice the goods the gods provided in the way of books, very much in the order in which they came in her way. Nothing, I know, ever eclipsed the perennial charm of a beloved volume of fairy tales well named "The Child's Own Book." This was read until it was reduced to a condition analogous to that of "The One Hoss Shay;" read with avidity throughout childhood, and ever afterwards recalled with tenderness.

It was a thick book, so thick as to be nearly cubical, and had in it, as it seems to me, almost every fairy tale that ever was written, appropriately illustrated with sketchy thumb-nail pictures of slim, short-

waisted princesses with veils out-blown like slender rainbows, and of fairy princes with no trousers to speak of and stupendous plumes in their caps — all in attitudes of preternatural grace. The pictures were almost as enchanting as the stories — more one could hardly say. Inspired by them, the child spent many a blissful hour drawing upon her slate similar radiant beings, and similar tables gorgeously set forth with "viands." It was especially interesting to draw the banquets. This, being wholly unhampered by perspective, she did with great minuteness of detail.

A beautiful illustrated edition of "Reynard the Fox" was among the home books, and was one of the most beloved of all. The biting, old-world satire of it, of course, was not for the child. She enjoyed it simply as a brisk and amusing narrative, or series of narratives rather, of the Æsop order, couched in pleasing verse and enriched by

most charming pictures. Another rather favourite book was memorable for its pictures only. This was the "Tour of Dr. Syntax in Search of the Picturesque;" a copy of which quaint old work, with its brightly coloured plates, was in the fine library of the country house at which the child oftenest stayed.

The books belonging to places where one visited were, however, as a rule, more of a tantalisation than a pleasure; for the claims of society persistently interfered with their enjoyment. Sometimes the child would go out to spend the night, or a day or two, with some small cousins of hers who lived near town. There was in their room a copy of "Telemachus"—that enthralling romance — which excited in the child a really painful longing. One might, it is true, take hurried peeps into it ever and anon in the intervals of play; but the troubled rapture of those moments hardly

made up for the wrench of tearing one's self away, always when something seemed just about to happen. Of course the child would have been more than welcome to take this book home, but it never occurred to her that it was possible, or to anybody else that she would care for it. "Don Quixote," into which she had made a frantic dip, was, I know, most kindly pressed upon her from this library, and was carried off by her with the warmest glow of gratitude.

With equal pleasure she once carried home "Tom Jones" from a semi-public library to which she had access. She noticed, I remember, that the librarian looked after her rather thoughtfully as she went off affectionately clasping her prize, and she wondered a little what it meant. Contrary to her expectation, for it had a very interesting look, she did not like "Tom Jones" at all, and promptly re-

turned it, quite of her own volition, though one knows now, of course, that it would in any case have been prohibited; as Gil Blas was, to her profound and abiding regret, in the midst of her keen enjoyment of it. But, as a rule, I repeat, she read what came to her hand; and, surrounded as it was her great good fortune to be by sound and wholesome literature, took, so far as I know, no hurt therefrom.

The child's encounter with Poe's "Narrative of A. Gordon Pym" was, I think, the only real misadventure which befell her in the world of letters. Once begun, it was impossible not to go on with it; though to go on was an agony which made the child physically ill. And when one was through with reading it, one had to *think* it, sickening and shuddering under what seemed its unbearable horror.

But there was, as I have said, upon the whole, an inseparable connection in the

child's mind between print and pleasure. Enjoying so indiscriminately, she must have enjoyed the best crudely and imperfectly enough. But she did feel, in a way, the thrill of greatness and was, I believe, the better for it.

Language

16. Language

I CAN recall but one instance in which the child in reading was particularly troubled by inability to understand the meaning of language. This time, the inability was total and complete. There was no foothold for progress into the intent of the printed pages, and of the striking illustrations with which they were interspersed. It was a yellowed copy of Victor Hugo's "Orientales," which she found in the library at home, that so baffled and tantalised her; tantalised her into a veritable fever of longing to penetrate its mysteries.

It did not occur to her to ask any one to translate it for her. I do not know, indeed, whether she would greatly have cared to have it translated. What she

wished, and wished with a curious intensity, was to break for herself through the barrier erected by a strange tongue, and assert her inalienable right to read that which was written. She had known before this that there were other languages, — languages which she could not understand, — but this was probably the first time that this fact, in concrete shape, ever confronted her, and she revolted against it. Single-handed and alone, she contended with the outlandish words, bringing to bear upon them all the light which might be reflected by contiguous pictures of long-necked ladies and fierce-looking gentlemen, attired indifferently in baggy trousers, and all in highly emotional attitudes. But this light was faint indeed. Meeting no appreciable reward, her efforts slackened; and insensibly her profound desire to read this book faded away. The one who was the child, however, has yet

a deep and thrilling sympathy with those who spend laborious days poring over nameless characters on hoary bricks and immemorial monuments, resolute to pluck from them their purport. She too was once, in a way, of this guild.

Of course, her native tongue was, at times, a medium almost equally dense through which to descry meaning; but one would not have that utterly shut-out feeling, nor any analogous to it. Occasional oases of lucidity were enough to compensate for extensive deserts of obscurity; and even through those deserts there not seldom flitted phantasmagoria of meaning which were interesting and alluring.

Once, I remember, — probably before her own school days began, — somebody took her to a school commencement; and a gentleman made a long, long address, to which the child listened with respectful

attention. The general sound of the words was familiar to her, and she was hardly aware of the fact that she did not at all understand. But all at once he said something about a pink sash, and the child looked around at the person who had brought her, and laughed delightedly. She knew what a pink sash was, and she knew he was saying that girls liked to wear pink sashes; and oh, how refreshing it was! Then and there the child decided that it was a very nice speech.

Her conceptions of import, I repeat, were often fantastic enough; but I recall no particular embarrassment which came to her from misinterpretation of what was said to her, or from involuntary Malapropism on her own part; while I recollect more than one small tragedy of pronunciation and idiom.

The precise significance which one attaches to an expression is not always evi-

dent, but one's choice of words, and manner of calling them are patent and unmistakable; are matters for "daws to peck at." At least it was so in the child's own case. Just how grown people said some things, she often found it surprisingly hard to make out; whether, for example, they said *latrobe* or *batrobe*, *salt cellar* or *salt setter*, long remained uncertain; and she oscillated accordingly between the alternate expressions — with a leaning toward the last, in both instances.

It was very seldom indeed, so far as I can recall, that she referred her problems to the omniscience of her elders; for she was distinctly shy and sensitive in the matter of speech; feeling, I think, in an undefined way, that a knowledge of one's own tongue is something which comes by nature; and that any ignorance of it was consequently abnormal and surprising. Hence, as a rule, she merely revolved her

difficulties in her own mind, and experimented guardedly with her conclusions.

The child did not like to make mistakes; but she did not care to be priggish in her English. It was not a mistake, she felt, to say *raggetty*, when all one's friends said it; or *bit* for *it* (under certain circumstances), or *Hi-spy* for *I-spy*. *Squsb* and *squinch* were not grown people's verbs, but they belonged to the vernacular of her own circle, and she employed them unhesitatingly. The dictionary, of course, said *June bug* and *grass-hopper*, but custom among her contemporaries sanctioned *Juney bug* and *hopper-grass;* and the child would have disdained so gross an affectation as the use of the first-mentioned terms.

It was eccentricity which she especially sought to avoid. But no care, apparently, could render one secure against verbal tragedy. Surely it was natural to think that one's reading-book was an infallible

guide, and that one was absolutely safe in following it. But once the child prefaced some trifling anecdote of school life, which she was going to tell, with the classic phrase, " Not long since," — and everybody laughed; actually laughed at that! Everybody, that is, but her mother; who glanced at the others in a way the child understood as well then as she did afterwards. Her mother did not want the others to laugh. Clearly her mother knew that there was nothing funny in saying "Not long since," as the reading-book did, but only a commendable ambition to conform to the best models of expression. It was terrible, though, to be laughed at, even by the ignorant and unthinking; and the child never tried again to import book English into private life.

But even every-day English had its pitfalls. Once, for instance, she was off somewhere with her grandmother, whom she

dearly loved and most implicitly trusted (for her grandmother was very good to her; one remembers now just how it felt to be cuddled in her lap), and in the yard there was a great deal of green grass, which it seemed to the child a pity to waste. So she crept behind her grandmother, as she sat in the porch talking to some other ladies, and whispered, "Would it be anything if I took off my shoes?" And her grandmother said, "It would be *something*, of course!"—said it jestingly, it is needless to say. Perhaps she told her whether or not she might take off her shoes, but I do not remember. The child was too much disconcerted to care in the least about that.

She sat down soberly on the porch steps, and thought and thought. She wondered what possible way there was of asking about the fitness of a thing unless one said, Is it anything? But then everything was some-

thing, sure enough! This should surely be conclusive against the phrase. But somehow it was not conclusive. Deep down in her mind there was an inchoate perception that there are expressions which carry their own authority with them and laugh at logical analysis. Anyhow, her heart was hot within her. She dimly felt that she had not been justly dealt with. And she did not care any more about the green grass.

17. Random Recollections

ON looking back, the scattered memories of childhood are merged into one galaxy, and may not well be resolved into orderly succession. One seems, however, to recognise as the most distant of all one which is merely that of lying on a low bed near an open window, in a room with several people in it, who were moved, I think, in some way. The child must have been about two and a half years old — not more certainly — if I associate this memory correctly; of which I am by no means sure.

Another unmistakably very early reminiscence is that of being borrowed by a lady and carried by her to spend the day at some distant-place, a place almost at the end of the street-car line — almost at

the end of the earth, as it seemed to the child — and of wearing a very special hair ribbon, which afforded her great inward satisfaction. It was blue velvet, I think, and it was made into a bow and hooked on, instead of being just tied on, the bow being placed rather on the side, with what the child considered very novel and happy effect. This was really the feature of the day. All else has become to the last degree hazy.

A recollection certainly approaching the primordial is that of sitting on one of a tier of little benches in the infant class at Sunday school, and of artlessly mentioning aloud some detail regarding home affairs; a procedure which suddenly struck her as perhaps bordering upon unconventionality, and embarrassed her quite painfully.

A little later, I suppose, but not much, came the well-remembered experience of being a little chalky-white statue in one of a series of tableaux; and of standing with

one's eyes shut an unconscionably long time, so long that it got to be decidedly monotonous; and so one suddenly opened them and looked around, intending after the refreshment of this intermission to resume posing. But one had hardly seen more than a bewildering blur of light before there was a ripple of laughter, and the curtain fell.

About this time, probably, for the two memories are somehow linked, she must have first come in contact with death — in a shape so gentle that it seemed to her the most beautiful thing in the world. A little child had died in the house with her, and she saw it lying still and lovely, with flowers about it and in its little folded hands. After that, I remember, the child, for awhile, would often shut her eyes, and cross her hands upon her breast, and lie motionless, playing that she was dead.

It is only, however, by the aid of internal

evidence that one can supply so much as approximate dates to the most vivid even of these childish memories, which seem to have nothing to do with time. And yet, curiously enough, her seventh birthday somehow asserts itself as a landmark — for no reason whatsoever that may now be discovered. One remembers dimly that she rejoiced in the fact of being seven years old, as she had previously rejoiced, doubtless, in being six and five and four and three, and subsequently gloried in being eight and nine and ten and eleven, and that is all. Whatever it was that made the day special, whatever it was that set it apart from other birthdays, has passed into oblivion. Practically the day has faded to a mere colourless date, as the immortal Cheshire Cat faded to a disembodied grin. Why in this instance there should be chronology without history, and in other cases history without chronology, it would be

quite vain to wonder. One can only accept the fact as one of the many whimsicalities of memory.

One then can only say, Once upon a time such and such a thing was. "Once upon a time" was to the child the best of all dates; unforgettable, sufficiently definite, and instinct with all manner of delectable suggestion. What that was as a past tense, "some of these days" was as a future — purple phrases both from the vernacular of dreamland.

The child never thought of linking the magic words "once upon a time" with any account of her own experiences, the simple adverb "once" suiting better with such modest happenings than a prelude of such delicious promise. But anything, she was aware, might happen. Thrilling potentialities of every kind, painful and pleasant, were upon every side, and vividly present to her imagination.

One day her drawing teacher, warning her against an undue dependence upon her rubber, said to her, "What would you do if you were cast on a desert island, and had n't any rubber?" This made the child seriously consider. For being cast on a desert island was to her by no means a remote contingency. What was more common than for people to be cast on desert islands — in books? One might almost think that people went to sea for no other purpose. Certainly they could have gone for none which would have been more productive of pleasure for the child, who loved books of adventure as much as any boy of them all.

It was, probably, with a latent idea of the usefulness of such an accomplishment on desert islands and in trackless forests (which were also very possible destinations; as witness The Swiss Family Robinson and The Forest Exiles) that the child tried long

and laboriously to acquire the art of making a fire by rubbing two sticks together, after the alleged Indian manner; in the feasibility of which her faith gradually weakened.

But the child was not the stuff, perhaps, of which illustrious castaways are made. One day, I recollect, she ran off by herself and climbed a slim, tall, little tree, by the aid of an adjacent fence. It was a hard tree to climb, straight and inhospitable; so she felt pleased and triumphant as she stood in the "crotch," holding on tightly and looking about her. The next day she was going home, and possibly she had been unwilling to leave this feat unachieved, and so had run off to make one last attempt. At any rate, she was alone, and suddenly became awe-struck and lonesome in the great, silent landscape, under the vast, empty sky. She determined to come down. But the ground

appeared to have sunk to a frightful depth beneath her, and the fence seemed to have withdrawn itself quite beyond reach. Descent without assistance was clearly impossible, and assistance was out of the question, for nobody knew where she was. Obviously she must pass the rest of her life up in that tree, cut off from family and friends. No maxims of philosophy, no ingenious devices for mitigating her misfortune, occurred to her. She stood panic-stricken, overwhelmed with dejection. Memory leaves her thus. One can only infer that in some way rescue came to her.

Interest quite as painful attaches in recollection to an experience of a wholly different order. She was at a little country church, sitting at the outer end of a pew near the door. The day was warm and the child restless. Across the aisle from her was a water bucket, with a long-handled cocoa-nut-shell dipper in it. The water

was so clear that the grain of the wood showed through it to the bottom, and one seemed to see how cool it was. It would be very nice, the child thought, to have some water — especially out of that interesting cocoa-nut-shell dipper. Then it would be very fascinating to drink in church. It was such a little, informal church, it would surely be nothing remarkable if one slipped over to the water and helped one's self. Why should it have been put there, if not for people to drink? A spirit of adventure took possession of the child. "S'pose" she should go over there and drink! She wondered how it would feel to do such a thing. And then she did it.

It felt very strange indeed, but the eyes of the other children, she knew, were fixed upon her and it behooved her to justify her course by *sang-froid* and self-possession. She dipped up a clear and delicious-looking draught in the long-handled dipper

and raised it to her lips; and just then, alas, without premonition or warning, she found herself convulsed by a fit of agonised, helpless, albeit subdued, giggling, not unattended by symptoms of strangulation. With a burning face she stole back to her seat to face the condemnatory glances of her peers, — for there seems to have been that day an unaccountable absence of adult surveillance. I do not know that she ever went back to that church. Never willingly, I am certain.

It is noticeable how large a place the country occupies in memory a place out of all proportion to that which belonged to it in actual experience; a fact due, of course, to the mind's especial susceptibility to impression under circumstances in any degree unfamiliar.

The country even arrogates to itself things common to both city and country. Night, for instance, belongs almost wholly

to the latter. Regarding night at home memory is so silent that one might almost think there was "no night there." I remember, indeed, only the Christmas eve night already referred to; and with that there is no association of darkness. On the other hand, one may close one's eyes now and see almost with the effect of actual vision how, in the country, the sky would grow gray behind the darkening close-set trees at the foot of the lawn, and bring out in their tops great frowning, upturned faces which the child hated.

Partly to shut out those unpleasant giant profiles, the child would often turn around and rest her head on the step behind her with her arm for a pillow, when she and the other children were gathered on the front porch steps waiting for supper. — Supper in the country was very late, almost in the middle of the night, it seemed to the child. But it was very nice when it came.

— Sometimes when she was comfortably turned away from the faces in the trees, it came unexpectedly soon; so soon that she would not understand that it had come until some friend would shake her by the shoulder, and tell her very loudly and insistently that supper was ready and everybody had gone in: then the child would get up hastily, feeling obscurely ruffled, and blink very much when she came into the lamplight.

I do not in the least recollect the degree of light or darkness which would be in her bedroom at home when she would fall asleep. Away from home, I know, the lamp would be extinguished as a preliminary to repose (a singularly irrational preliminary, it seemed to the child); and one's eyes would instantly open very wide and watch the thick, palpitating blackness for awhile, with unwinking vigilance and intense suspicion; though, before long, with-

out one's knowledge or consent, one's lids would treacherously close in the very face of danger.

The child would spend the night sometimes with some small cousins of hers, who were accustomed to sing a little song when the lamp was taken away about not being afraid in the dark; and the child would sing too, but with serious mental reservation. For she *was* afraid in the dark; but while she was singing she was not quite so much afraid. Sometimes the dark was more terrible than at other times. One particular night in the country, I remember, she felt that she really could not endure it. So she squeezed her lids together, and tried desperately to go to sleep before the lamp should be put out; tried with an intensity of effort that made her abnormally wide-awake, and more quiveringly alive than ever to the ensuing inkiness, and all that might be lurking in it.

Memory, I repeat, shows things detachedly, and with small regard to natural order. One cannot, for example, at all determine just where in her experience belongs what seems to have been her first clear recognition of the grim fact of mortality. The closed eyes and folded hands of the little child whom she saw lying in flower-strewn loveliness, brought to her, as I have intimated, no real idea of death. It was long afterwards, I think, measuring in consonance with the brief span of childhood, that this came to her. It came to her curiously. A tiny peach-tree had sprung up in the yard at her home, and the child had "spoken for it." So it was hers, and she loved it almost as if it had been a sentient thing. When, therefore, somebody one day told her that her peach-tree was going to die the child was startled and distressed. A wild idea of some sudden blight occurred to her, and she flew

to investigate. But no; there stood the little green switch, apparently in full health and vigour. Still the person who had spoken to her persisted that it was going to die. What did it mean? How did anybody know that it was going to die? Her anxious questions at last elicited the terse reply, "Everything is going to die!"

The identity of the philosophic spirit who figured in this incident is now lost, and of the peach-tree recollection presents no further trace, but almost like an impression of yesterday remains the sudden sense of universal insubstantiality, of relentless, all-embracing doom. All that the child had known seemed to melt away from her, and to leave her standing in a vast vacuity. A profound impersonal sadness enveloped her like a gray mist. What did anything matter? Everything was going to die!

Whatever formal assent there may previously have been to the proposition, All men

are mortal, and this visible frame of things is ever hasting to decay, this, I feel sure, was her first vital contact with the idea. And yet, even in this case, one may be mistaken. For memory seems sometimes to have taken from the past at random almost, — choosing and rejecting, as from mere caprice, among things that present no obvious ground of difference.

Certainly the child had countless happy moments; but one isolates itself from all the rest, and defies forgetfulness. It was in the country. The child and the other children were playing some romping game on the smooth green lawn, under the great oaks; the sun was setting; and the child's mother, in a beautiful white dress, was on the porch, not far off. And all at once, as by the sudden waking of some new sense, the child knew that she was utterly happy. This stands out with curious distinctness as the supreme moment of all childhood.

Memoirs of a Child

Conclusion

UPON the whole, there is nothing to tell of the child that in interest and importance may not be matched in the history of any child. Nothing in particular happened to her; she did nothing at all remarkable; and not even any especially sparkling gems of infantile wit and wisdom remain to her credit. The thoughts and feelings which were hers find their analogues, I think, in the minds of all children; else it would not have seemed at all worth while to consider them even thus slightly.

The child, I know, would have winced and shrunk to have had the veil lifted even so far as it has been lifted, upon her inner life, — upon her naïve tastes and fancies, her crude reflections, her petty perturb-

ations, her idle and fantastic dreams. For one sees, in looking back, that, with all her laughing speech, she was in reality most reticent, reticent to a degree that makes one marvel.

And so one is half remorseful toward the child, — is moved by an impulse of apology. For the child, as one thinks of her, is not at all one's self but a small personage who was — once upon a time — and who bequeathed to one her memories. For the sake of these one feels toward her a curious remote tenderness, — for the sake even of the trifles which she garnered. But there are things not trifles also, things human and divine, still too sacred for any words.